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HENRY JAMES, JR.

# THE AUTHOR OF BELTRAFFIO

PANDORA • GEORGINA'S REASONS

THE PATH OF DUTY

FOUR MEETINGS

BOSTON

JAMES R. OSGOOD AND COMPANY

1885

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# THE AUTHOR OF BELTRAFFIO.

THE

# AUTHOR OF BELTRAFFIO.

## PART I.

MUCH as I wished to see him, I had kept my letter of introduction for three weeks in my pocket-book. I was nervous and timid about meeting him, — conscious of youth and ignorance, convinced that he was tormented by strangers, and especially by my country-people, and not exempt from the suspicion that he had the irritability as well as the brilliancy of genius. Moreover, the pleasure, if it should occur (for I could scarcely believe it was near at hand), would be so great that I wished to think of it in advance, to feel that it was in my pocket, not to mix it with satisfactions more superficial and usual. In the little game of new sensations that I was playing with my ingenuous mind, I wished to keep my visit to the author of *Beltraffio* as a trump card. It was three years after the publication of that fascinating work, which I had read over five times, and which now, with my riper judgment, I admire on the whole as much as ever. This will give you about the date of my first visit (of any duration) to England; for you

will not have forgotten the commotion — I may even say the scandal — produced by Mark Ambient's masterpiece. It was the most complete presentation that had yet been made of the gospel of art; it was a kind of æsthetic war-cry. People had endeavored to sail nearer to "truth" in the cut of their sleeves and the shape of their sideboards; but there had not as yet been, among English novels, such an example of beauty of execution and genuineness of substance. Nothing had been done in that line from the point of view of art for art. This was my own point of view, I may mention, when I was twenty-five; whether it is altered now I won't take upon myself to say — especially as the discerning reader will be able to judge for himself. I had been in England, briefly, a twelvemonth before the time to which I began by alluding, and had learned then that Mr. Ambient was in distant lands — was making a considerable tour in the East: so there was nothing to do but to keep my letter till I should be in London again. It was of little use to me to hear that his wife had not left England, and, with her little boy, their only child, was spending the period of her husband's absence — a good many months — at a small place they had down in Surrey. They had a house in London which was let. All this I learned, and also that Mrs. Ambient was charming (my friend the American poet, from whom I had my introduction, had never seen her, his relations with the great man being only epistolary); but she was not, after all, though she had lived so near the

rose, the author of *Beltraffio*, and I did not go down into Surrey to call on her. I went to the Continent, spent the following winter in Italy, and returned to London in May. My visit to Italy opened my eyes to a good many things, but to nothing more than the beauty of certain pages in the works of Mark Ambient. I had every one of his productions in my portmanteau, — they are not, as you know, very numerous, but he had preluded to *Beltraffio* by some exquisite things, — and I used to read them over in the evening at the inn. I used to say to myself that the man who drew those characters and wrote that style understood what he saw and knew what he was doing. This is my only reason for mentioning my winter in Italy. He had been there much in former years, and he was saturated with what painters call the "feeling" of that classic land. He expressed the charm of the old hill-cities of Tuscany, the look of certain lonely grass-grown places which, in the past, had echoed with life; he understood the great artists, he understood the spirit of the Renaissance, he understood everything. The scene of one of his earlier novels was laid in Rome, the scene of another in Florence, and I moved through these cities in company with the figures whom Mark Ambient had set so vividly upon their feet. This is why I was now so much happier even than before in the prospect of making his acquaintance.

At last, when I had dallied with this privilege long enough, I despatched to him the missive of the

American poet. He had already gone out of town; he shrank from the rigor of the London "season," and it was his habit to migrate on the first of June. Moreover, I had heard that this year he was hard at work on a new book, into which some of his impressions of the East were to be wrought, so that he desired nothing so much as quiet days. This knowledge, however, did not prevent me — *cet âge est sans pitié* — from sending with my friend's letter a note of my own, in which I asked Mr. Ambient's leave to come down and see him for an hour or two, on a day to be designated by himself. My proposal was accompanied with a very frank expression of my sentiments, and the effect of the whole projectile was to elicit from the great man the kindest possible invitation. He would be delighted to see me, especially if I should turn up on the following Saturday and would remain till the Monday morning. We would take a walk over the Surrey commons, and I could tell him all about the other great man, the one in America. He indicated to me the best train, and it may be imagined whether on the Saturday afternoon I was punctual at Waterloo. He carried his benevolence to the point of coming to meet me at the little station at which I was to alight, and my heart beat very fast as I saw his handsome face, surmounted with a soft wide-awake, and which I knew by a photograph long since enshrined upon my mantelshelf, scanning the carriage windows as the train rolled up. He recognized me as infallibly as I had

recognized him; he appeared to know by instinct how a young American of an æsthetic turn would look when much divided between eagerness and modesty. He took me by the hand, and smiled at me, and said: "You must be — a — *you*, I think!" and asked if I should mind going on foot to his house, which would take but a few minutes. I remember thinking it a piece of extraordinary affability that he should give directions about the conveyance of my bag, and feeling altogether very happy and rosy, in fact quite transported, when he laid his hand on my shoulder as we came out of the station.

I surveyed him, askance, as we walked together; I had already — I had indeed instantly — seen that he was a delightful creature. His face is so well known that I need n't describe it; he looked to me at once an English gentleman and a man of genius, and I thought that a happy combination. There was just a little of the Bohemian in his appearance; you would easily have guessed that he belonged to the guild of artists and men of letters. He was addicted to velvet jackets, to cigarettes, to loose shirt-collars, to looking a little dishevelled. His features, which were fine, but not perfectly regular, are fairly enough represented in his portraits; but no portrait that I have seen gives any idea of his expression. There were so many things in it, and they chased each other in and out of his face. I have seen people who were grave and gay in quick alternation; but Mark Ambient was grave and gay at one and the

same moment. There were other strange oppositions and contradictions in his slightly faded and fatigued countenance. He seemed both young and old, both anxious and indifferent. He had evidently had an active past, which inspired one with curiosity, and yet it was impossible not to be more curious still about his future. He was just enough above middle height to be spoken of as tall, and rather lean and long in the flank. He had the friendliest, frankest manner possible, and yet I could see that he was shy. He was thirty-eight years old at the time *Beltraffio* was published. He asked me about his friend in America, about the length of my stay in England, about the last news in London and the people I had seen there; and I remember looking for the signs of genius in the very form of his questions, and thinking I found it. I liked his voice.

There was genius in his house, too, I thought, when we got there; there was imagination in the carpets and curtains, in the pictures and books, in the garden behind it, where certain old brown walls were muffled in creepers that appeared to me to have been copied from a masterpiece of one of the pre-Raphaelites. That was the way many things struck me at that time, in England; as if they were reproductions of something that existed primarily in art or literature. It was not the picture, the poem, the fictive page, that seemed to me a copy; these things were the originals, and the life of happy and distinguished people was fashioned in their image. Mark Ambient called his

house a cottage, and I perceived afterwards that he was right; for if it had not been a cottage it must have been a villa, and a villa, in England at least, was not a place in which one could fancy him at home. But it was, to my vision, a cottage glorified and translated; it was a palace of art, on a slightly reduced scale, — it was an old English demesne. It nestled under a cluster of magnificent beeches, it had little creaking lattices that opened out of, or into, pendent mats of ivy, and gables, and old red tiles, as well as a general aspect of being painted in water-colors and inhabited by people whose lives would go on in chapters and volumes. The lawn seemed to me of extraordinary extent, the garden-walls of incalculable height, the whole air of the place delightfully still, private, proper to itself. "My wife must be somewhere about," Mark Ambient said, as we went in. "We shall find her perhaps; we have got about an hour before dinner. She may be in the garden. I will show you my little place."

We passed through the house, and into the grounds, as I should have called them, which extended into the rear. They covered but three or four acres, but, like the house, they were very old and crooked, and full of traces of long habitation, with inequalities of level and little steps — mossy and cracked were these — which connected the different parts with each other. The limits of the place, cleverly dissimulated, were muffled in the deepest verdure. They made, as I remember, a kind of curtain at the further end, in

one of the folds of which, as it were, we presently perceived, from afar, a little group. "Ah, there she is!" said Mark Ambient; "and she has got the boy." He made this last remark in a slightly different tone from any in which he yet had spoken. I was not fully aware of it at the time, but it lingered in my ear and I afterwards understood it.

"Is it your son?" I inquired, feeling the question not to be brilliant.

"Yes, my only child. He 's always in his mother's pocket. She coddles him too much." It came back to me afterwards, too — the manner in which he spoke these words. They were not petulant; they expressed rather a sudden coldness, a kind of mechanical submission. We went a few steps further, and then he stopped short and called the boy, beckoning to him repeatedly.

"Dolcino, come and see your daddy!" There was something in the way he stood still and waited that made me think he did it for a purpose. Mrs. Ambient had her arm round the child's waist, and he was leaning against her knee; but though he looked up at the sound of his father's voice, she gave no sign of releasing him. A lady, apparently a neighbor, was seated near her, and before them was a garden-table, on which a tea-service had been placed.

Mark Ambient called again, and Dolcino struggled in the maternal embrace, but he was too tightly held, and after two or three fruitless efforts he suddenly turned round and buried his head deep in his mother's

lap. There was a certain awkwardness in the scene; I thought it rather odd that Mrs. Ambient should pay so little attention to her husband. But I would not for the world have betrayed my thought, and, to conceal it, I observed that it must be such a pleasant thing to have tea in the garden. "Ah, she won't let him come!" said Mark Ambient, with a sigh; and we went our way till we reached the two ladies. He mentioned my name to his wife, and I noticed that he addressed her as "My dear," very genially, without any trace of resentment at her detention of the child. The quickness of the transition made me vaguely ask myself whether he were henpecked,—a shocking conjecture, which I instantly dismissed. Mrs. Ambient was quite such a wife as I should have expected him to have; slim and fair, with a long neck and pretty eyes and an air of great refinement. She was a little cold, and a little shy; but she was very sweet, and she had a certain look of race, justified by my afterwards learning that she was "connected" with two or three great families. I have seen poets married to women of whom it was difficult to conceive that they should gratify the poetic fancy,—women with dull faces and glutinous minds, who were none the less, however, excellent wives. But there was no obvious incongruity in Mark Ambient's union. Mrs. Ambient, delicate and quiet, in a white dress, with her beautiful child at her side, was worthy of the author of a work so distinguished as *Beltraffio*. Round her neck she wore a black velvet ribbon, of

which the long ends, tied behind, hung down her back, and to which, in front, was attached a miniature portrait of her little boy. Her smooth, shining hair was confined in a net. She gave me a very pleasant greeting, and Dolcino — I thought this little name of endearment delightful — took advantage of her getting up to slip away from her and go to his father, who said nothing to him, but simply seized him and held him high in his arms for a moment, kissing him several times.

I had lost no time in observing that the child, who was not more than seven years old, was extraordinarily beautiful. He had the face of an angel, — the eyes, the hair, the more than mortal bloom, the smile of innocence. There was something touching, almost alarming, in his beauty, which seemed to be composed of elements too fine and pure for the breath of this world. When I spoke to him, and he came and held out his hand and smiled at me, I felt a sudden pity for him, as if he had been an orphan, or a changeling, or stamped with some social stigma. It was impossible to be, in fact, more exempt from these misfortunes, and yet, as one kissed him, it was hard to keep from murmuring "Poor little devil!" though why one should have applied this epithet to a living cherub is more than I can say. Afterwards, indeed, I knew a little better; I simply discovered that he was too charming to live, wondering at the same time that his parents should not have perceived it, and should not be in proportionate grief and despair. For myself,

I had no doubt of his evanescence, having already noticed that there is a kind of charm which is like a death-warrant.

The lady who had been sitting with Mrs. Ambient was a jolly, ruddy personage, dressed in velveteen and rather limp feathers, whom I guessed to be the vicar's wife, — our hostess did not introduce me, — and who immediately began to talk to Ambient about chrysanthemums. This was a safe subject, and yet there was a certain surprise for me in seeing the author of *Beltraffio* even in such superficial communion with the Church of England. His writings implied so much detachment from that institution, expressed a view of life so profane, as it were, so independent, and so little likely, in general, to be thought edifying, that I should have expected to find him an object of horror to vicars and their ladies — of horror repaid on his own part by good-natured but brilliant mockery. This proves how little I knew as yet of the English people and their extraordinary talent for keeping up their forms, as well as of some of the mysteries of Mark Ambient's hearth and home. I found afterwards that he had, in his study, between smiles and cigar-smoke, some wonderful comparisons for his clerical neighbors; but meanwhile the chrysanthemums were a source of harmony, for he and the vicaress were equally fond of them, and I was surprised at the knowledge they exhibited of this interesting plant. The lady's visit, however, had presumably already been long, and she presently got up, saying she must go, and kissed Mrs.

Ambient. Mark started to walk with her to the gate of the grounds, holding Dolcino by the hand.

"Stay with me, my darling," Mrs. Ambient said to the boy, who was wandering away with his father.

Mark Ambient paid no attention to the summons, but Dolcino turned round and looked with eyes of shy entreaty at his mother. "Can't I go with papa?"

"Not when I ask you to stay with me."

"But please don't ask me, mamma," said the child, in his little clear, new voice.

"I must ask you when I want you. Come to me, my darling." And Mrs. Ambient, who had seated herself again, held out her long, slender hands.

Her husband stopped, with his back turned to her, but without releasing the child. He was still talking to the vicaress, but this good lady, I think, had lost the thread of her attention. She looked at Mrs. Ambient and at Dolcino, and then she looked at me, smiling very hard, in an extremely fixed, cheerful manner.

"Papa," said the child, "mamma wants me not to go with you."

"He 's very tired — he has run about all day. He ought to be quiet till he goes to bed. Otherwise he won't sleep." These declarations fell successively and gravely from Mrs. Ambient's lips.

Her husband, still without turning round, bent over the boy and looked at him in silence. The vicaress gave a genial, irrelevant laugh, and observed that he was a precious little pet. "Let him choose," said

Mark Ambient. "My dear little boy, will you go with me or will you stay with your mother?"

"Oh, it's a shame!" cried the vicar's lady, with increased hilarity.

"Papa, I don't think I can choose," the child answered, making his voice very low and confidential. "But I have been a great deal with mamma to-day," he added in a moment.

"And very little with papa! My dear fellow, I think you have chosen!" And Mark Ambient walked off with his son, accompanied by re-echoing but inarticulate comments from my fellow-visitor.

His wife had seated herself again, and her fixed eyes, bent upon the ground, expressed for a few moments so much mute agitation that I felt as if almost any remark from my own lips would be a false note. But Mrs. Ambient quickly recovered herself, and said to me civilly enough that she hoped I didn't mind having had to walk from the station. I reassured her on this point, and she went on, "We have got a thing that might have gone for you, but my husband would n't order it."

"That gave me the pleasure of a walk with him," I rejoined.

She was silent a minute, and then she said, "I believe the Americans walk very little."

"Yes, we always run," I answered laughingly.

She looked at me seriously, and I began to perceive a certain coldness in her pretty eyes. "I suppose your distances are so great."

"Yes; but we break our marches! I can't tell you what a pleasure it is for me to find myself here," I added. "I have the greatest admiration for Mr. Ambient."

"He will like that. He likes being admired."

"He must have a very happy life, then. He has many worshippers."

"Oh, yes, I have seen some of them," said Mrs. Ambient, looking away, very far from me, rather as if such a vision were before her at the moment. Something in her tone seemed to indicate that the vision was scarcely edifying, and I guessed very quickly that she was not in sympathy with the author of *Beltraffio*. I thought the fact strange, but, somehow, in the glow of my own enthusiasm, I did n't think it important; it only made me wish to be rather explicit about that enthusiasm.

"For me, you know," I remarked, "he is quite the greatest of living writers."

"Of course I can't judge. Of course he 's very clever," said Mrs. Ambient, smiling a little.

"He 's magnificent, Mrs. Ambient! There are pages in each of his books that have a perfection that classes them with the greatest things. Therefore, for me to see him in this familiar way, — in his habit as he lives, — and to find, apparently, the man as delightful as the artist, I can't tell you how much too good to be true it seems, and how great a privilege I think it." I knew that I was gushing, but I could n't help it, and what I said was a good deal less than what I felt. I was by no means sure that I

should dare to say even so much as this to Ambient himself, and there was a kind of rapture in speaking it out to his wife which was not affected by the fact that, as a wife, she appeared peculiar. She listened to me with her face grave again, and with her lips a little compressed, as if there were no doubt, of course, that her husband was remarkable, but at the same time she had heard all this before and could n't be expected to be particularly interested in it. There was even in her manner an intimation that I was rather young, and that people usually got over that sort of thing. "I assure you that for me this is a red-letter day," I added.

She made no response, until after a pause, looking round her, she said abruptly, though gently, "We are very much afraid about the fruit this year."

My eyes wandered to the mossy, mottled, garden walls, where plum-trees and pear-trees, flattened and fastened upon the rusty bricks, looked like crucified figures with many arms. "Does n't it promise well?" I inquired.

"No, the trees look very dull. We had such late frosts."

Then there was another pause. Mrs. Ambient kept her eyes fixed on the opposite end of the grounds, as if she were watching for her husband's return with the child. "Is Mr. Ambient fond of gardening?" it occurred to me to inquire, irresistibly impelled as I felt myself, moreover, to bring the conversation constantly back to him.

"He's very fond of plums," said his wife.

"Ah, well then, I hope your crop will be better than you fear. It's a lovely old place," I continued. "The whole character of it is that of certain places that he describes. Your house is like one of his pictures."

"It's a pleasant little place. There are hundreds like it."

"Oh, it has got his tone," I said, laughing, and insisting on my point the more that Mrs. Ambient appeared to see in my appreciation of her simple establishment a sign of limited experience.

It was evident that I insisted too much. "His tone?" she repeated, with a quick look at me, and a slightly heightened color.

"Surely he has a tone, Mrs. Ambient."

"Oh, yes, he has indeed! But I don't in the least consider that I am living in one of his books; I should n't care for that, at all," she went on, with a smile which had in some degree the effect of converting her slightly sharp protest into a joke deficient in point. "I am afraid I am not very literary," said Mrs. Ambient. "And I am not artistic."

"I am very sure you are not ignorant, not stupid," I ventured to reply, with the accompaniment of feeling immediately afterwards that I had been both familiar and patronizing. My only consolation was in the reflection that it was she, and not I, who had begun it. She had brought her idiosyncrasies into the discussion.

"Well, whatever I am, I am very different from my husband. If you like him, you won't like me. You need n't say anything. Your liking me is n't in the least necessary!"

"Don't defy me!" I exclaimed.

She looked as if she had not heard me, which was the best thing she could do; and we sat some time without further speech. Mrs. Ambient had evidently the enviable English quality of being able to be silent without being restless. But at last she spoke; she asked me if there seemed to be many people in town. I gave her what satisfaction I could on this point, and we talked a little about London and of some pictures it presented at that time of the year. At the end of this I came back, irrepressibly, to Mark Ambient.

"Does n't he like to be there now? I suppose he does n't find the proper quiet for his work. I should think his things had been written, for the most part, in a very still place. They suggest a great stillness, following on a kind of tumult. Don't you think so? I suppose London is a tremendous place to collect impressions, but a refuge like this, in the country, must be much better for working them up. Does he get many of his impressions in London, do you think?" I proceeded from point to point in this malign inquiry, simply because my hostess, who probably thought me a very pushing and talkative young man, gave me time; for when I paused — I have not represented my pauses — she simply

continued to let her eyes wander, and, with her long fair fingers, played with the medallion on her neck. When I stopped altogether, however, she was obliged to say something, and what she said was that she had not the least idea where her husband got his impressions. This made me think her, for a moment, positively disagreeable; delicate and proper and rather aristocratically dry as she sat there. But I must either have lost the impression a moment later, or been goaded by it to further aggression, for I remember asking her whether Mr. Ambient were in a good vein of work, and when we might look for the appearance of the book on which he was engaged. I have every reason now to know that she thought me an odious person.

She gave a strange, small laugh as she said, "I am afraid you think I know a great deal more about my husband's work than I do. I have n't the least idea what he is doing," she added presently, in a slightly different, that is a more explanatory, tone, as if she recognized in some degree the enormity of her confession. "I don't read what he writes!"

She did not succeed (and would not, even had she tried much harder) in making it seem to me anything less than monstrous. I stared at her, and I think I blushed. "Don't you admire his genius? Don't you admire *Beltraffio?*"

She hesitated a moment, and I wondered what she could possibly say. She did not speak — I could see — the first words that rose to her lips; she

repeated what she had said a few minutes before. "Oh, of course he's very clever!" And with this she got up; her husband and little boy had reappeared. Mrs. Ambient left me and went to meet them; she stopped and had a few words with her husband, which I did not hear, and which ended in her taking the child by the hand and returning to the house with him. Her husband joined me in a moment, looking, I thought, the least bit conscious and constrained, and said that if I would come in with him he would show me my room. In looking back upon these first moments of my visit to him, I find it important to avoid the error of appearing to have understood his situation from the first, and to have seen in him the signs of things which I learnt only afterwards. This later knowledge throws a backward light, and makes me forget that at least on the occasion of which I am speaking now (I mean that first afternoon), Mark Ambient struck me as a fortunate man. Allowing for this, I think he was rather silent and irresponsive as we walked back to the house, though I remember well the answer he made to a remark of mine in relation to his child.

"That's an extraordinary little boy of yours," I said. "I have never seen such a child."

"Why do you call him extraordinary?"

"He's so beautiful, so fascinating. He's like a little work of art."

He turned quickly, grasping my arm an instant. "Oh, don't call him that, or you'll—you'll—!"

And in his hesitation he broke off suddenly, laughing at my surprise. But immediately afterwards he added, "You will make his little future very difficult."

I declared that I wouldn't for the world take any liberties with his little future — it seemed to me to hang by threads of such delicacy. I should only be highly interested in watching it.

"You Americans are very sharp," said Ambient. "You notice more things than we do."

"Ah, if you want visitors who are not struck with you, you should n't ask me down here!"

He showed me my room, a little bower of chintz, with open windows where the light was green, and before he left me he said irrelevantly, "As for my little boy, you know, we shall probably kill him between us, before we have done with him!" And he made this assertion as if he really believed it, without any appearance of jest, with his fine, near-sighted, expressive eyes looking straight into mine.

"Do you mean by spoiling him?"

"No; by fighting for him!"

"You had better give him to me to keep for you," I said. "Let me remove the apple of discord."

I laughed, of course, but he had the air of being perfectly serious. "It would be quite the best thing we could do. I should be quite ready to do it."

"I am greatly obliged to you for your confidence."

Mark Ambient lingered there, with his hands in his pockets. I felt, within a few moments, as if I had, morally speaking, taken several steps nearer to

him. He looked weary, just as he faced me then, looked preoccupied, and as if there were something one might do for him. I was terribly conscious of the limits of my own ability, but I wondered what such a service might be, feeling at bottom, however, that the only thing I could do for him was to like him. I suppose he guessed this, and was grateful for what was in my mind; for he went on presently, "I haven't the advantage of being an American. But I also notice a little, and I have an idea that — a —" here he smiled and laid his hand on my shoulder, "that even apart from your nationality, you are not destitute of intelligence! I have only known you half an hour, but — a —" And here he hesitated again. "You are very young, after all."

"But you may treat me as if I could understand you!" I said; and before he left me to dress for dinner he had virtually given me a promise that he would.

When I went down into the drawing-room — I was very punctual — I found that neither my hostess nor my host had appeared. A lady rose from a sofa, however, and inclined her head as I rather surprisedly gazed at her. "I dare say you don't know me," she said, with the modern laugh. "I am Mark Ambient's sister." Whereupon I shook hands with her, saluting her very low. Her laugh was modern — by which I mean that it consisted of the vocal agitation which, between people who meet in drawing-rooms, serves as the solvent of social mysteries,

the medium of transitions; but her appearance was — what shall I call it? — mediæval. She was pale and angular, with a long, thin face, inhabited by sad, dark eyes, and black hair intertwined with golden fillets and curious chains. She wore a faded velvet robe, which clung to her when she moved, fashioned, as to the neck and sleeves, like the garments of old Venetians and Florentines. She looked pictorial and melancholy, and was so perfect an image of a type which I, in my ignorance, supposed to be extinct, that while she rose before me I was almost as much startled as if I had seen a ghost. I afterwards perceived that Miss Ambient was not incapable of deriving pleasure from the effect she produced, and I think this sentiment had something to do with her sinking again into her seat, with her long, lean, but not ungraceful arms locked together in an archaic manner on her knees, and her mournful eyes addressing themselves to me with an intentness which was a menace of what they were destined subsequently to inflict upon me. She was a singular, self-conscious, artificial creature, and I never, subsequently, more than half penetrated her motives and mysteries. Of one thing I am sure, however: that they were considerably less extraordinary than her appearance announced. Miss Ambient was a restless, disappointed, imaginative spinster, consumed with the love of Michael-Angelesque attitudes and mystical robes; but I am pretty sure she had not in her nature those depths of unutterable thought which, when you first knew

her, seemed to look out from her eyes and to prompt her complicated gestures. Those features, in especial, had a misleading eloquence; they rested upon you with a far-off dimness, an air of obstructed sympathy, which was certainly not always a key to the spirit of their owner; and I suspect that a young lady could not really have been so dejected and disillusioned as Miss Ambient looked, without having committed a crime for which she was consumed with remorse, or parted with a hope which she could not sanely have entertained. She had, I believe, the usual allowance of vulgar impulses: she wished to be looked at, she wished to be married, she wished to be thought original.

It costs me something to speak in this irreverent manner of Mark Ambient's sister, but I shall have still more disagreeable things to say before I have finished my little anecdote, and moreover, — I confess it, — I owe the young lady a sort of grudge. Putting aside the curious cast of her face, she had no natural aptitude for an artistic development, — she had little real intelligence. But her affectations rubbed off on her brother's renown, and as there were plenty of people who disapproved of him totally, they could easily point to his sister as a person formed by his influence. It was quite possible to regard her as a warning, and she had done him but little good with the world at large. He was the original, and she was the inevitable imitation. I think he was scarcely aware of the impression she produced, beyond having a general idea that she made up very

well as a Rossetti; he was used to her, and he was sorry for her, — wishing she would marry and observing that she did n't. Doubtless I take her too seriously, for she did me no harm, though I am bound to add that I feel I can only half account for her. She was not so mystical as she looked, but she was a strange, indirect, uncomfortable, embarrassing woman. My story will give the reader at best so very small a knot to untie that I need not hope to excite his curiosity by delaying to remark that Mrs. Ambient hated her sister-in-law. This I only found out afterwards, when I found out some other things. But I mention it at once, for I shall perhaps not seem to count too much on having enlisted the imagination of the reader if I say that he will already have guessed it. Mrs. Ambient was a person of conscience, and she endeavored to behave properly to her kinswoman, who spent a month with her twice a year; but it required no great insight to discover that the two ladies were made of a very different paste, and that the usual feminine hypocrisies must have cost them, on either side, much more than the usual effort. Mrs. Ambient, smooth-haired, thin-lipped, perpetually fresh, must have regarded her crumpled and dishevelled visitor as a very stale joke; she herself was not a Rossetti, but a Gainsborough or a Lawrence, and she had in her appearance no elements more romantic than a cold, ladylike candor, and a well-starched muslin dress.

It was in a garment, and with an expression, of

this kind, that she made her entrance, after I had exchanged a few words with Miss Ambient. Her husband presently followed her, and there being no other company we went to dinner. The impression I received from that repast is present to me still. There were elements of oddity in my companions, but they were vague and latent, and did n't interfere with my delight. It came mainly, of course, from Ambient's talk, which was the most brilliant and interesting I had ever heard. I know not whether he laid himself out to dazzle a rather juvenile pilgrim from over the sea; but it matters little, for it was very easy for him to shine. He was almost better as a talker than as a writer; that is, if the extraordinary finish of his written prose be really, as some people have maintained, a fault. There was such a kindness in him, however, that I have no doubt it gave him ideas to see me sit open-mouthed, as I suppose I did. Not so the two ladies, who not only were very nearly dumb from beginning to the end of the meal, but who had not the air of being struck with such an exhibition of wit and knowledge. Mrs. Ambient, placid and detached, met neither my eye nor her husband's; she attended to her dinner, watched the servants, arranged the puckers in her dress, exchanged at wide intervals a remark with her sister-in-law, and while she slowly rubbed her white hands between the courses, looked out of the window at the first signs of twilight — the long June day allowing us to dine without candles. Miss Ambient appeared to give little direct heed to her

brother's discourse; but on the other hand she was much engaged in watching its effect upon me. Her lustreless pupils continued to attach themselves to my countenance, and it was only her air of belonging to another century that kept them from being importunate. She seemed to look at me across the ages, and the interval of time diminished the vividness of the performance. It was as if she knew in a general way that her brother must be talking very well, but she herself was so rich in ideas that she had no need to pick them up, and was at liberty to see what would become of a young American when subjected to a high æsthetic temperature.

The temperature was æsthetic, certainly, but it was less so than I could have desired, for I was unsuccessful in certain little attempts to make Mark Ambient talk about himself. I tried to put him on the ground of his own writings, but he slipped through my fingers every time and shifted the saddle to one of his contemporaries. He talked about Balzac and Browning, and what was being done in foreign countries, and about his recent tour in the East, and the extraordinary forms of life that one saw in that part of the world. I perceived that he had reasons for not wishing to descant upon literature, and suffered him without protest to deliver himself on certain social topics, which he treated with extraordinary humor and with constant revelations of that power of ironical portraiture of which his books are full. He had a great deal to say about London, as London appears to the

observer who does n't fear the accusation of cynicism, during the high-pressure time—from April to July—of its peculiarities. He flashed his faculty of making the fanciful real and the real fanciful over the perfunctory pleasures and desperate exertions of so many of his compatriots, among whom there were evidently not a few types for which he had little love. London bored him, and he made capital sport of it; his only allusion, that I can remember, to his own work was his saying that he meant some day to write an immense grotesque epic of London society. Miss Ambient's perpetual gaze seemed to say to me: "Do you perceive how artistic we are? Frankly now, is it possible to be more artistic than this? You surely won't deny that we are remarkable." I was irritated by her use of the plural pronoun, for she had no right to pair herself with her brother; and moreover, of course, I could not see my way to include Mrs. Ambient. But there was no doubt that, for that matter, they were all remarkable, and, with all allowances, I had never heard anything so artistic. Mark Ambient's conversation seemed to play over the whole field of knowledge and taste, and to flood it with light and color.

After the ladies had left us he took me into his study to smoke, and here I led him on to talk freely enough about himself. I was bent upon proving to him that I was worthy to listen to him, upon repaying him for what he had said to me before dinner, by showing him how perfectly I understood. He

liked to talk; he liked to defend his ideas (not that I attacked them); he liked a little perhaps — it was a pardonable weakness — to astonish the youthful mind and to feel its admiration and sympathy. I confess that my own youthful mind was considerably astonished at some of his speeches; he startled me and he made me wince. He could not help forgetting, or rather he could n't know, how little personal contact I had had with the school in which he was master; and he promoted me at a jump, as it were, to the study of its innermost mysteries. My trepidations, however, were delightful; they were just what I had hoped for, and their only fault was that they passed away too quickly; for I found that, as regards most things, I very soon seized Mark Ambient's point of view. It was the point of view of the artist to whom every manifestation of human energy was a thrilling spectacle, and who felt forever the desire to resolve his experience of life into a literary form. On this matter of the passion for form, — the attempt at perfection, the quest for which was to his mind the real search for the holy grail, — he said the most interesting, the most inspiring things. He mixed with them a thousand illustrations from his own life, from other lives that he had known, from history and fiction, and above all from the annals of the time that was dear to him beyond all periods, — the Italian *cinque-cento*. I saw that in his books he had only said half of his thought, and what he had kept back — from motives that I deplored when I

learnt them later — was the richer part. It was his fortune to shock a great many people, but there was not a grain of bravado in his pages (I have always maintained it, though often contradicted), and at bottom the poor fellow, an artist to his finger-tips, and regarding a failure of completeness as a crime, had an extreme dread of scandal. There are people who regret that having gone so far he did not go further; but I regret nothing (putting aside two or three of the motives I just mentioned), for he arrived at perfection, and I don't see how you can go beyond that. The hours I spent in his study — this first one and the few that followed it; they were not, after all, so numerous — seem to glow, as I look back on them, with a tone which is partly that of the brown old room, rich, under the shaded candlelight where we sat and smoked, with the dusky, delicate bindings of valuable books; partly that of his voice, of which I still catch the echo, charged with the images that came at his command. When we went back to the drawing-room we found Miss Ambient alone in possession of it; and she informed us that her sister-in-law had a quarter of an hour before been called by the nurse to see Dolcino, who appeared to be a little feverish.

"Feverish! how in the world does he come to be feverish?" Ambient asked. "He was perfectly well this afternoon."

"Beatrice says you walked him about too much — you almost killed him."

"Beatrice must be very happy — she has an opportunity to triumph!" Mark Ambient said, with a laugh of which the bitterness was just perceptible.

"Surely not if the child is ill," I ventured to remark, by way of pleading for Mrs. Ambient.

"My dear fellow, you are not married — you don't know the nature of wives!" my host exclaimed.

"Possibly not; but I know the nature of mothers."

"Beatrice is perfect as a mother," said Miss Ambient, with a tremendous sigh and her fingers interlaced on her embroidered knees.

"I shall go up and see the child," her brother went on. "Do you suppose he's asleep?"

"Beatrice won't let you see him, Mark," said the young lady, looking at me, though she addressed our companion.

"Do you call that being perfect as a mother?" Ambient inquired.

"Yes, from her point of view."

"Damn her point of view!" cried the author of *Beltraffio*. And he left the room; after which we heard him ascend the stairs.

I sat there for some ten minutes with Miss Ambient, and we naturally had some conversation, which was begun, I think, by my asking her what the point of view of her sister-in-law could be.

"Oh, it's so very odd," she said. "But we are so very odd, altogether. Don't you find us so? We have lived so much abroad. Have you people like us in America?"

"You are not all alike, surely; so that I don't think I understand your question. We have no one like your brother — I may go so far as that."

"You have probably more persons like his wife," said Miss Ambient, smiling.

"I can tell you that better when you have told me about her point of view."

"Oh, yes — oh, yes. Well, she does n't like his ideas. She does n't like them for the child. She thinks them undesirable."

Being quite fresh from the contemplation of some of Mark Ambient's *arcana*, I was particularly in a position to appreciate this announcement. But the effect of it was to make me, after staring a moment, burst into laughter, which I instantly checked when I remembered that there was a sick child above.

"What has that infant to do with ideas?" I asked. "Surely, he can't tell one from another. Has he read his father's novels?"

"He 's very precocious and very sensitive, and his mother thinks she can't begin to guard him too early." Miss Ambient's head drooped a little to one side, and her eyes fixed themselves on futurity. Then suddenly there was a strange alteration in her face; she gave a smile that was more joyless than her gravity — a conscious, insincere smile, and added, "When one has children, it 's a great responsibility — what one writes."

"Children are terrible critics," I answered. "I am rather glad I have n't got any."

"Do you also write then? And in the same style as my brother? And do you like that style? And do people appreciate it in America? I don't write, but I think I feel." To these and various other inquiries and remarks the young lady treated me, till we heard her brother's step in the hall again, and Mark Ambient reappeared. He looked flushed and serious, and I supposed that he had seen something to alarm him in the condition of his child. His sister apparently had another idea; she gazed at him a moment as if he were a burning ship on the horizon, and simply murmured, "Poor old Mark!"

"I hope you are not anxious," I said.

"No, but I 'm disappointed. She won't let me in. She has locked the door, and I 'm afraid to make a noise." I suppose there might have been something ridiculous in a confession of this kind, but I liked my new friend so much that for me it did n't detract from his dignity. "She tells me — from behind the door — that she will let me know if he is worse."

"It 's very good of her," said Miss Ambient.

I had exchanged a glance with Mark in which it is possible that he read that my pity for him was untinged with contempt, though I know not why he should have cared; and as, presently, his sister got up and took her bedroom candlestick, he proposed that we should go back to his study. We sat there till after midnight; he put himself into his slippers, into an old velvet jacket, lighted an ancient pipe, and talked considerably less than he had done before.

There were longish pauses in our communion, but they only made me feel that we had advanced in intimacy. They helped me, too, to understand my friend's personal situation, and to perceive that it was by no means the happiest possible. When his face was quiet, it was vaguely troubled; it seemed to me to show that for him, too, life was a struggle, as it has been for many another man of genius. At last I prepared to leave him, and then, to my ineffable joy, he gave me some of the sheets of his forthcoming book,—it was not finished, but he had indulged in the luxury, so dear to writers of deliberation, of having it "set up," from chapter to chapter, as he advanced,—he gave me, I say, the early pages, the *prémices*, as the French have it, of this new fruit of his imagination, to take to my room and look over at my leisure. I was just quitting him when the door of his study was noiselessly pushed open, and Mrs. Ambient stood before us. She looked at us a moment, with her candle in her hand, and then she said to her husband that as she supposed he had not gone to bed, she had come down to tell him that Dolcino was more quiet and would probably be better in the morning. Mark Ambient made no reply; he simply slipped past her in the doorway, as if he were afraid she would seize him in his passage, and bounded upstairs, to judge for himself of his child's condition. Mrs. Ambient looked slightly discomfited, and for a moment I thought she was going to give chase to her husband. But she resigned herself, with a sigh, while her eyes wandered

over the lamp-lit room, where various books, at which I had been looking, were pulled out of their places on the shelves, and the fumes of tobacco seemed to hang in mid-air. I bade her good-night, and then, without intention, by a kind of fatality, the perversity which had already made me insist unduly on talking with her about her husband's achievements, I alluded to the precious proof-sheets with which Ambient had intrusted me and which I was nursing there under my arm. "It is the opening chapters of his new book," I said. "Fancy my satisfaction at being allowed to carry them to my room!"

She turned away, leaving me to take my candlestick from the table in the hall; but before we separated, thinking it apparently a good occasion to let me know once for all — since I was beginning, it would seem, to be quite "thick" with my host — that there was no fitness in my appealing to her for sympathy in such a case; before we separated, I say, she remarked to me with her quick, round, well-bred utterance, "I dare say you attribute to me ideas that I have n't got. I don't take that sort of interest in my husband's proof-sheets. I consider his writings most objectionable!"

## PART II.

I HAD some curious conversation the next morning with Miss Ambient, whom I found strolling in the garden before breakfast. The whole place looked as fresh and trim, amid the twitter of the birds, as if, an hour before, the housemaids had been turned into it with their dustpans and feather-brushes. I almost hesitated to light a cigarette, and was doubly startled when, in the act of doing so, I suddenly perceived the sister of my host, who had, in any case, something of the oddity of an apparition, standing before me. She might have been posing for her photograph. Her sad-colored robe arranged itself in serpentine folds at her feet; her hands locked themselves listlessly together in front; and her chin rested upon a cinquecento ruff. The first thing I did, after bidding her good-morning, was to ask her for news of her little nephew, — to express the hope that she had heard he was better. She was able to gratify this hope, and spoke as if we might expect to see him during the day. We walked through the shrubberies together, and she gave me a great deal of information about her brother's ménage, which offered me an opportunity to mention to her that his wife had told me, the night before, that she thought his productions objectionable.

"She does n't usually come out with that so soon!" Miss Ambient exclaimed, in answer to this piece of gossip.

"Poor lady, she saw that I am a fanatic."

"Yes, she won't like you for that. But you must n't mind, if the rest of us like you! Beatrice thinks a work of art ought to have a 'purpose.' But she 's a charming woman — don't you think her charming? — she 's such a type of the lady."

"She 's very beautiful," I answered; while I reflected that though it was true, apparently, that Mark Ambient was mis-mated, it was also perceptible that his sister was perfidious. She told me that her brother and his wife had no other difference but this one, that she thought his writings immoral and his influence pernicious. It was a fixed idea; she was afraid of these things for the child. I answered that it was not a trifle — a woman's regarding her husband's mind as a well of corruption, and she looked quite struck with the novelty of my remark. "But there has n't been any of the sort of trouble that there so often is among married people," she said. "I suppose you can judge for yourself that Beatrice is n't at all — well, whatever they call it when a woman misbehaves herself. And Mark does n't make love to other people, either. I assure you he does n't! All the same, of course, from her point of view, you know, she has a dread of my brother's influence on the child — on the formation of his character, of his principles. It is as if it were a subtle poison, or a contagion, or

something that would rub off on Dolcinò when his father kisses him or holds him on his knee. If she could, she would prevent Mark from ever touching him. Every one knows it; visitors see it for themselves; so there is no harm in my telling you. Is n't it excessively odd? It comes from Beatrice's being so religious, and so tremendously moral, and all that. And then, of course, we must n't forget," my companion added, unexpectedly, "that some of Mark's ideas are — well, really — rather queer!"

I reflected, as we went into the house, where we found Ambient unfolding the *Observer* at the breakfast-table, that none of them were probably quite so queer as his sister. Mrs. Ambient did not appear at breakfast, being rather tired with her ministrations, during the night, to Dolcino. Her husband mentioned, however, that she was hoping to go to church. I afterwards learned that she did go, but I may as well announce without delay that he and I did not accompany her. It was while the church-bell was murmuring in the distance that the author of *Beltraffio* led me forth for the ramble he had spoken of in his note. I will not attempt to say where we went, or to describe what we saw. We kept to the fields and copses and commons, and breathed the same sweet air as the nibbling donkeys and the browsing sheep, whose woolliness seemed to me, in those early days of my acquaintance with English objects, but a part of the general texture of the small, dense landscape, which looked as if the harvest were gathered by the

shears. Everything was full of expression for Mark Ambient's visitor, — from the big, bandy-legged geese, whose whiteness was a "note," amid all the tones of green, as they wandered beside a neat little oval pool, the foreground of a thatched and whitewashed inn, with a grassy approach and a pictorial sign, — from these humble wayside animals to the crests of high woods which let a gable or a pinnacle peep here and there, and looked, even at a distance, like trees of good company, conscious of an individual profile. I admired the hedgerows, I plucked the faint-hued heather, and I was forever stopping to say how charming I thought the thread-like footpaths across the fields, which wandered, in a diagonal of finer grain, from one smooth stile to another. Mark Ambient was abundantly good-natured, and was as much entertained with my observations as I was with the literary allusions of the landscape. We sat and smoked upon stiles, broaching paradoxes in the decent English air; we took short cuts across a park or two, where the bracken was deep and my companion nodded to the old woman at the gate; we skirted rank covers, which rustled here and there as we passed, and we stretched ourselves at last on a heathery hillside, where, if the sun was not too hot, neither was the earth too cold, and where the country lay beneath us in a rich blue mist. Of course I had already told Ambient what I thought of his new novel, having the previous night read every word of the opening chapters before I went to bed.

"I am not without hope of being able to make it my best," he said, as I went back to the subject, while we turned up our heels to the sky. "At least the people who dislike my prose — and there are a great many of them, I believe — will dislike this work most." This was the first time I had heard him allude to the people who could n't read him, — a class which is supposed always to sit heavy upon the consciousness of the man of letters. A man organized for literature, as Mark Ambient was, must certainly have had the normal proportion of sensitiveness, of irritability; the artistic *ego*, capable in some cases of such monstrous development, must have been, in his composition, sufficiently erect and definite. I will not therefore go so far as to say that he never thought of his detractors, or that he had any illusions with regard to the number of his admirers (he could never so far have deceived himself as to believe he was popular); but I may at least affirm that adverse criticism, as I had occasion to perceive later, ruffled him visibly but little, that he had an air of thinking it quite natural he should be offensive to many minds, and that he very seldom talked about the newspapers, which, by the way, were always very stupid in regard to the author of *Beltraffio*. Of course he may have thought about them — the newspapers — night and day; the only point I wish to make is that he did n't show it; while, at the same time, he did n't strike one as a man who was on his guard. I may add that, as regards his hope of making the work on which he was then

engaged the best of his books, it was only partly carried out. That place belongs, incontestably, to *Beltraffio*, in spite of the beauty of certain parts of its successor. I am pretty sure, however, that he had, at the moment of which I speak, no sense of failure; he was in love with his idea, which was indeed magnificent, and though for him, as, I suppose, for every artist, the act of execution had in it as much torment as joy, he saw his work growing a little every day and filling out the largest plan he had yet conceived. "I want to be truer than I have ever been," he said, settling himself on his back, with his hands clasped behind his head; "I want to give an impression of life itself. No, you may say what you will, I have always arranged things too much, always smoothed them down and rounded them off and tucked them in, — done everything to them that life does n't do. I have been a slave to the old superstitions."

"You a slave, my dear Mark Ambient? You have the freest imagination of our day!"

"All the more shame to me to have done some of the things I have! The reconciliation of the two women in *Ginistrella*, for instance, which could never really have taken place. That sort of thing is ignoble; I blush when I think of it! This new affair must be a golden vessel, filled with the purest distillation of the actual; and oh, how it bothers me, the shaping of the vase — the hammering of the metal! I have to hammer it so fine, so smooth; I don't do more than an inch or two a day. And all the while

I have to be so careful not to let a drop of the liquor escape! When I see the kind of things that Life does, I despair of ever catching her peculiar trick. She has an impudence, Life! If one risked a fiftieth part of the effects she risks! It takes ever so long to believe it. You don't know yet, my dear fellow. It is n't till one has been watching Life for forty years that one finds out half of what she 's up to! Therefore one's earlier things must inevitably contain a mass of rot. And with what one sees, on one side, with its tongue in its cheek, defying one to be real enough, and on the other the *bonnes gens* rolling up their eyes at one's cynicism, the situation has elements of the ludicrous which the artist himself is doubtless in a position to appreciate better than any one else. Of course one must n't bother about the *bonnes gens*," Mark Ambient went on, while my thoughts reverted to his ladylike wife, as interpreted by his remarkable sister.

"To sink your shaft deep, and polish the plate through which people look into it — that 's what your work consists of," I remember remarking.

"Ah, polishing one's plate — that is the torment of execution!" he exclaimed, jerking himself up and sitting forward. "The effort to arrive at a surface — if you think a surface necessary — some people don't, happily for them! My dear fellow, if you could see the surface I dream of, as compared with the one with which I have to content myself. Life is really too short for art — one has n't time to make one's

shell ideally hard. Firm and bright — firm and bright! — the devilish thing has a way, sometimes, of being bright without being firm. When I rap it with my knuckles it does n't give the right sound. There are horrible little flabby spots where I have taken the second-best word, because I could n't for the life of me think of the best. If you knew how stupid I am sometimes! They look to me now like pimples and ulcers on the brow of beauty!"

"That 's very bad — very bad," I said, as gravely as I could.

"Very bad? It 's the highest social offence I know; it ought — it absolutely ought — I 'm quite serious — to be capital. If I knew I should be hanged else, I should manage to find the best word. The people who could n't — some of them don't know it when they see it — would shut their inkstands, and we should n't be deluged by this flood of rubbish!"

I will not attempt to repeat everything that passed between us, or to explain just how it was that, every moment I spent in his company, Mark Ambient revealed to me more and more that he looked at all things from the standpoint of the artist, felt all life as literary material. There are people who will tell me that this is a poor way of feeling it, and I am not concerned to defend my statement, having space merely to remark that there is something to be said for any interest which makes a man feel so much. If Mark Ambient did really, as I suggested above, have imaginative contact with "all life," I, for my part,

envy him his *arrière-pensée*. At any rate it was through the receipt of this impression of him that by the time we returned I had acquired the feeling of intimacy I have noted. Before we got up for the homeward stretch, he alluded to his wife's having once — or perhaps more than once — asked him whether he should like Dolcino to read *Beltraffio*. I think he was unconscious at the moment of all that this conveyed to me — as well, doubtless, of my extreme curiosity to hear what he had replied. He had said that he hoped very much Dolcino would read all his works — when he was twenty; he should like him to know what his father had done. Before twenty it would be useless; he would n't understand them.

"And meanwhile do you propose to hide them, — to lock them up in a drawer?" Mrs. Ambient had inquired.

"Oh, no; we must simply tell him that they are not intended for small boys. If you bring him up properly, after that he won't touch them."

To this Mrs. Ambient had made answer that it would be very awkward when he was about fifteen; and I asked her husband if it was his opinion in general, then, that young people should not read novels.

"Good ones — certainly not!" said my companion. I suppose I had had other views, for I remember saying that, for myself, I was not sure it was bad for them, if the novels were "good" enough. "Bad for *them*, I don't say so much!" Ambient exclaimed. "But very bad, I am afraid, for the novel!" That

oblique, accidental allusion to his wife's attitude was followed by a franker style of reference as we walked home. "The difference between us is simply the opposition between two distinct ways of looking at the world, which have never succeeded in getting on together, or making any kind of common ménage, since the beginning of time. They have borne all sorts of names, and my wife would tell you it's the difference between Christian and Pagan. I may be a pagan, but I don't like the name; it sounds sectarian. She thinks me, at any rate, no better than an ancient Greek. It's the difference between making the most of life and making the least, so that you'll get another better one in some other time and place. Will it be a sin to make the most of that one too, I wonder; and shall we have to be bribed off in the future state, as well as in the present? Perhaps I care too much for beauty — I don't know; I delight in it, I adore it, I think of it continually, I try to produce it, to reproduce it. My wife holds that we should n't think too much about it. She 's always afraid of that, always on her guard. I don't know what she has got on her back! And she 's so pretty, too, herself! Don't you think she 's lovely? She was, at any rate, when I married her. At that time I was n't aware of that difference I speak of — I thought it all came to the same thing: in the end, as they say. Well, perhaps it will, in the end. I don't know what the end will be. Moreover, I care for seeing things as they are; that 's the way I try to show them in my novels. But

you must n't talk to Mrs. Ambient about things as they are. She has a mortal dread of things as they are."

"She 's afraid of them for Dolcino," I said: surprised a moment afterwards at being in a position — thanks to Miss Ambient — to be so explanatory; and surprised even now that Mark should n't have shown visibly that he wondered what the deuce I knew about it. But he did n't; he simply exclaimed, with a tenderness that touched me, —

"Ah, nothing shall ever hurt *him!*" He told me more about his wife before we arrived at the gate of his house, and if it be thought that he was querulous, I am afraid I must admit that he had some of the foibles as well as the gifts of the artistic temperament; adding, however, instantly, that hitherto, to the best of my belief, he had very rarely complained. "She thinks me immoral — that 's the long and short of it," he said, as we paused outside a moment, and his hand rested on one of the bars of his gate; while his conscious, demonstrative, expressive, perceptive eyes, — the eyes of a foreigner, I had begun to account them, much more than of the usual Englishman, — viewing me now evidently as quite a familiar friend, took part in the declaration. "It 's very strange, when one thinks it all over, and there 's a grand comicality in it which I should like to bring out. She is a very nice woman, extraordinarily well behaved, upright and clever, and with a tremendous lot of good sense about a good many matters. Yet her conception of a novel — she has explained it to me once or twice, and she

does n't do it badly, as exposition — is a thing so false that it makes me blush. It is a thing so hollow, so dishonest, so lying, in which life is so blinked and blinded, so dodged and disfigured, that it makes my ears burn. It 's two different ways of looking at the whole affair," he repeated, pushing open the gate. "And they are irreconcilable!" he added, with a sigh. We went forward to the house, but on the walk, half way to the door, he stopped, and said to me, "If you are going into this kind of thing, there 's a fact you should know beforehand; it may save you some disappointment. There 's a hatred of art, there 's a hatred of literature!" I looked up at the charming house, with its genial color and crookedness, and I answered, with a smile, that those evil passions might exist, but that I should never have expected to find them there. "Oh, it does n't matter, after all," he said, laughing; which I was glad to hear, for I was reproaching myself with having excited him.

If I had, his excitement soon passed off, for at lunch he was delightful; strangely delightful, considering that the difference between himself and his wife was, as he had said, irreconcilable. He had the art, by his manner, by his smile, by his natural kindliness, of reducing the importance of it in the common concerns of life; and Mrs. Ambient, I must add, lent herself to this transaction with a very good grace. I watched her, at table, for further illustrations of that fixed idea of which Miss Ambient had spoken to me; for, in the light of the united revelations of her sister-

in-law and her husband, she had come to seem to me a very singular personage. I am obliged to say that the signs of a fanatical temperament were not more striking in my hostess than before; it was only after a while that her air of incorruptible conformity, her tapering, monosyllabic correctness, began to appear to be themselves a cold, thin flame. Certainly, at first, she looked like a woman with as few passions as possible; but if she had a passion at all, it would be that of Philistinism. She might have been — for there are guardian-spirits, I suppose, of all great principles — the angel of propriety. Mark Ambient, apparently, ten years before, had simply perceived that she was an angel, without asking himself of what. He had been quite right in calling my attention to her beauty. In looking for the reason why he should have married her, I saw, more than before, that she was, physically speaking, a wonderfully cultivated human plant — that she must have given him many ideas and images. It was impossible to be more pencilled, more garden-like, more delicately tinted and petalled.

If I had had it in my heart to think Ambient a little of a hypocrite for appearing to forget at table everything he had said to me during our walk, I should instantly have cancelled such a judgment, on reflecting that the good news his wife was able to give him about their little boy was reason enough for his sudden air of happiness. It may have come partly, too, from a certain remorse at having complained to me of the fair lady who sat there, — a desire to show me that he was

after all not so miserable. Dolcino continued to be much better, and he had been promised he should come downstairs after he had had his dinner. As soon as we had risen from our own meal Ambient slipped away, evidently for the purpose of going to his child; and no sooner had I observed this than I became aware that his wife had simultaneously vanished. It happened that Miss Ambient and I, both at the same moment, saw the tail of her dress whisk out of a doorway, which led the young lady to smile at me, as if I now knew all the secrets of the Ambients. I passed with her into the garden, and we sat down on a dear old bench which rested against the west wall of the house. It was a perfect spot for the middle period of a Sunday in June, and its felicity seemed to come partly from an antique sun-dial which, rising in front of us and forming the centre of a small, intricate parterre, measured the moments ever so slowly, and made them safe for leisure and talk. The garden bloomed in the suffused afternoon, the tall beeches stood still for an example, and, behind and above us, a rose-tree of many seasons, clinging to the faded grain of the brick, expressed the whole character of the place in a familiar, exquisite smell. It seemed to me a place for genius to have every sanction, and not to encounter challenges and checks. Miss Ambient asked me if I had enjoyed my walk with her brother, and whether we had talked of many things.

"Well, of most things," I said, smiling, though I remembered that we had not talked of Miss Ambient.

"And don't you think some of his theories are very peculiar?"

"Oh, I guess I agree with them all." I was very particular, for Miss Ambient's entertainment, to guess.

"Do you think art is everything?" she inquired in a moment.

"In art, of course I do!"

"And do you think beauty is everything?"

"I don't know about its being everything. But it 's very delightful."

"Of course it is difficult for a woman to know how far to go," said my companion. "I adore everything that gives a charm to life. I am intensely sensitive to form. But sometimes I draw back — don't you see what I mean? — I don't quite see where I shall be landed. I only want to be quiet, after all," Miss Ambient continued, in a tone of stifled yearning which seemed to indicate that she had not yet arrived at her desire. "And one must be good, at any rate, must not one?" she inquired, with a cadence apparently intended for an assurance that my answer would settle this recondite question for her. It was difficult for me to make it very original, and I am afraid I repaid her confidence with an unblushing platitude. I remember, moreover, appending to it an inquiry, equally destitute of freshness, and still more wanting perhaps in tact, as to whether she did not mean to go to church, as that was an obvious way of being good. She replied that she had performed this duty in the

morning, and that for her, on Sunday afternoon, supreme virtue consisted in answering the week's letters. Then suddenly, without transition, she said to me, "It's quite a mistake about Dolcino being better. I have seen him, and he's not at all right."

"Surely his mother would know, would n't she?" I suggested.

She appeared for a moment to be counting the leaves on one of the great beeches. "As regards most matters, one can easily say what, in a given situation, my sister-in-law would do. But as regards this one, there are strange elements at work."

"Strange elements? Do you mean in the constitution of the child?"

"No, I mean in my sister-in-law's feelings."

"Elements of affection, of course; elements of anxiety. Why do you call them strange?"

She repeated my words. "Elements of affection, elements of anxiety. She is very anxious."

Miss Ambient made me vaguely uneasy; she almost frightened me, and I wished she would go and write her letters. "His father will have seen him now," I said, "and if he is not satisfied he will send for the doctor."

"The doctor ought to have been here this morning. He lives only two miles away."

I reflected that all this was very possibly only a part of the general tragedy of Miss Ambient's view of things; but I asked her why she had n't urged such a necessity upon her sister-in-law. She answered

me with a smile of extraordinary significance, and told me that I must have very little idea of what her relations with Beatrice were; but I must do her the justice to add that she went on to make herself a little more comprehensible by saying that it was quite reason enough for her sister not to be alarmed that Mark would be sure to be. He was always nervous about the child, and as they were predestined by nature to take opposite views, the only thing for Beatrice was to cultivate a false optimism. If Mark were not there, she would not be at all easy. I remembered what he had said to me about their dealings with Dolcino, — that between them they would put an end to him; but I did not repeat this to Miss Ambient: the less so that just then her brother emerged from the house, carrying his child in his arms. Close behind him moved his wife, grave and pale; the boy's face was turned over Ambient's shoulder, towards his mother. We got up to receive the group, and as they came near us Dolcino turned round. I caught, on his enchanting little countenance, a smile of recognition, and for the moment would have been quite content with it. Miss Ambient, however, received another impression, and I make haste to say that her quick sensibility, in which there was something maternal, argues that, in spite of her affectations, there was a strain of kindness in her. "It won't do at all — it won't do at all," she said to me under her breath. "I shall speak to Mark about the doctor."

The child was rather white, but the main difference I saw in him was that he was even more beautiful than the day before. He had been dressed in his festal garments, — a velvet suit and a crimson sash, — and he looked like a little invalid prince, too young to know condescension, and smiling familiarly on his subjects.

"Put him down, Mark, he 's not comfortable," Mrs. Ambient said.

"Should you like to stand on your feet, my boy?" his father asked.

"Oh, yes; I'm remarkably well," said the child.

Mark placed him on the ground; he had shining, pointed slippers, with enormous bows. "Are you happy now, Mr. Ambient?"

"Oh, yes, I am particularly happy," Dolcino replied. The words were scarcely out of his mouth when his mother caught him up, and in a moment, holding him on her knees, she took her place on the bench where Miss Ambient and I had been sitting. This young lady said something to her brother, in consequence of which the two wandered away into the garden together. I remained with Mrs. Ambient; but as a servant had brought out a couple of chairs I was not obliged to seat myself beside her. Our conversation was not animated, and I, for my part, felt there would be a kind of hypocrisy in my trying to make myself agreeable to Mrs. Ambient. I did n't dislike her — I rather admired her; but I was aware that I differed from her inexpressibly. Then

I suspected, what I afterwards definitely knew and have already intimated, that the poor lady had taken a dislike to me; and this of course was not encouraging. She thought me an obtrusive and even depraved young man, whom a perverse Providence had dropped upon their quiet lawn to flatter her husband's worst tendencies. She did me the honor to say to Miss Ambient, who repeated the speech, that she did n't know when she had seen her husband take such a fancy to a visitor; and she measured, apparently, my evil influence by Mark's appreciation of my society. I had a consciousness, not yet acute, but quite sufficient, of all this; but I must say that if it chilled my flow of small-talk, it did n't prevent me from thinking that the beautiful mother and beautiful child, interlaced there against their background of roses, made a picture such as I perhaps should not soon see again. I was free, I supposed, to go into the house and write letters, to sit in the drawing-room, to repair to my own apartment and take a nap; but the only use I made of my freedom was to linger still in my chair and say to myself that the light hand of Sir Joshua might have painted Mark Ambient's wife and son. I found myself looking perpetually at Dolcino, and Dolcino looked back at me, and that was enough to detain me. When he looked at me he smiled, and I felt it was an absolute impossibility to abandon a child who was smiling at one like that. His eyes never wandered; they attached themselves to mine, as if among all the small

incipient things of his nature there was a desire to say something to me. If I could have taken him upon my own knee, he perhaps would have managed to say it; but it would have been far too delicate a matter to ask his mother to give him up, and it has remained a constant regret for me that on that Sunday afternoon I did not, even for a moment, hold Dolcino in my arms. He had said that he felt remarkably well, and that he was especially happy; but though he may have been happy, with his charming head pillowed on his mother's breast, and his little crimson silk legs depending from her lap, I did not think he looked well. He made no attempt to walk about; he was content to swing his legs softly and strike one as languid and angelic.

Mark came back to us with his sister; and Miss Ambient, making some remark about having to attend to her correspondence, passed into the house. Mark came and stood in front of his wife, looking down at the child, who immediately took hold of his hand, keeping it while he remained. "I think Allingham ought to see him," Ambient said; "I think I will walk over and fetch him."

"That's Gwendolen's idea, I suppose," Mrs. Ambient replied, very sweetly.

"It's not such an out-of-the-way idea, when one's child is ill."

"I'm not ill, papa; I'm much better now," Dolcino remarked.

"Is that the truth, or are you only saying it to be

agreeable? You have a great idea of being agreeable, you know."

The boy seemed to meditate on this distinction, this imputation, for a moment; then his exaggerated eyes, which had wandered, caught my own as I watched him. "Do *you* think me agreeable?" he inquired, with the candor of his age, and with a smile that made his father turn round to me, laughing, and ask, mutely, with a glance, "Is n't he adorable?"

"Then why don't you hop about, if you feel so lusty?" Ambient went on, while the boy swung his hand.

"Because mamma is holding me close!"

"Oh, yes; I know how mamma holds you when I come near!" Ambient exclaimed, looking at his wife.

She turned her charming eyes up to him, without deprecation or concession, and after a moment she said, "You can go for Allingham if you like. I think myself it would be better. You ought to drive."

"She says that to get me away," Ambient remarked to me, laughing; after which he started for the doctor's.

I remained there with Mrs. Ambient, though our conversation had more pauses than speeches. The boy's little fixed white face seemed, as before, to plead with me to stay, and after a while it produced still another effect, a very curious one, which I shall find it difficult to express. Of course I expose myself to the charge of attempting to give fantastic reasons for an act which may have been simply the fruit

of a native want of discretion; and indeed the traceable consequences of that perversity were too lamentable to leave me any desire to trifle with the question. All I can say is that I acted in perfect good faith, and that Dolcino's friendly little gaze gradually kindled the spark of my inspiration. What helped it to glow were the other influences, — the silent, suggestive garden-nook, the perfect opportunity (if it was not an opportunity for that, it was an opportunity for nothing), and the plea that I speak of, which issued from the child's eyes, and seemed to make him say, "The mother that bore me and that presses me here to her bosom — sympathetic little organism that I am — has really the kind of sensibility which she has been represented to you as lacking; if you only look for it patiently and respectfully. How is it possible that she should n't have it? How is it possible that *I* should have so much of it (for I am quite full of it, dear, strange gentleman), if it were not also in some degree in her? I am my father's child, but I am also my mother's, and I am sorry for the difference between them!" So it shaped itself before me, the vision of reconciling Mrs. Ambient with her husband, of putting an end to their great disagreement. The project was absurd, of course, for had I not had his word for it — spoken with all the bitterness of experience — that the gulf that divided them was wellnigh bottomless? Nevertheless, a quarter of an hour after Mark had left us, I said to his wife that I could n't get over what she told me the night before

about her thinking her husband's writings "objectionable." I had been so very sorry to hear it, had thought of it constantly, and wondered whether it were not possible to make her change her mind. Mrs. Ambient gave me rather a cold stare; she seemed to be recommending me to mind my own business. I wish I had taken this mute counsel, but I did not. I went on to remark that it seemed an immense pity so much that was beautiful should be lost upon her.

"Nothing is lost upon me," said Mrs. Ambient. "I know they are very beautiful."

"Don't you like papa's books?" Dolcino asked, addressing his mother, but still looking at me. Then he added to me, "Won't you read them to me, American gentleman?"

"I would rather tell you some stories of my own," I said. "I know some that are very interesting."

"When will you tell them? To-morrow?"

"To-morrow, with pleasure, if that suits you."

Mrs. Ambient was silent at this. Her husband, during our walk, had asked me to remain another day; my promise to her son was an implication that I had consented, and it is not probable that the prospect was agreeable to her. This ought, doubtless, to have made me more careful as to what I said next; but all I can say is that it did n't. I presently observed that just after leaving her the evening before, and after hearing her apply to her husband's writings the epithet I had already quoted, I had, on going up

to my room, sat down to the perusal of those sheets of his new book which he had been so good as to lend me. I had sat entranced till nearly three in the morning. I had read them twice over. "You say you have n't looked at them. I think it 's such a pity you should n't. Do let me beg you to take them up. They are so very remarkable. I 'm sure they will convert you. They place him in — really — such a dazzling light. All that is best in him is there. I have no doubt it 's a great liberty, my saying all this; but excuse me, and *do* read them!"

"Do read them, mamma!" Dolcino repeated; "do read them!"

She bent her head and closed his lips with a kiss. "Of course I know he has worked immensely over them," she said; and after this she made no remark, but sat there looking thoughtful, with her eyes on the ground. The tone of these last words was such as to leave me no spirit for further pressure, and after expressing a fear that her husband had not found the doctor at home, I got up and took a turn about the grounds. When I came back, ten minutes later, she was still in her place watching her boy, who had fallen asleep in her lap. As I drew near she put her finger to her lips, and a moment afterwards she rose, holding the child, and murmured something about its being better that he should go upstairs. I offered to carry him, and held out my hands to take him; but she thanked me and turned away with the child seated on her arm, his head on

her shoulder. "I am very strong," she said, as she passed into the house, and her slim, flexible figure bent backwards with the filial weight. So I never touched Dolcino.

I betook myself to Ambient's study, delighted to have a quiet hour to look over his books by myself. The windows were open into the garden; the sunny stillness, the mild light of the English summer, filled the room, without quite chasing away the rich dusky tone which was a part of its charm, and which abode in the serried shelves where old morocco exhaled the fragrance of curious learning, and in the brighter intervals, where medals and prints and miniatures were suspended upon a surface of faded stuff. The place had both color and quiet; I thought it a perfect room for work, and went so far as to say to myself that, if it were mine to sit and scribble in, there was no knowing but that I might learn to write as well as the author of *Beltraffio*. This distinguished man did not turn up, and I rummaged freely among his treasures. At last I took down a book that detained me awhile, and seated myself in a fine old leather chair by the window to turn it over. I had been occupied in this way for half an hour, — a good part of the afternoon had waned, — when I became conscious of another presence in the room, and, looking up from my quarto, saw that Mrs. Ambient, having pushed open the door in the same noiseless way that marked, or disguised, her entrance the night before, had advanced across the threshold. On seeing

me she stopped; she had not, I think, expected to find me. But her hesitation was only of a moment; she came straight to her husband's writing-table as if she were looking for something. I got up and asked her if I could help her. She glanced about an instant, and then put her hand upon a roll of papers which I recognized, as I had placed it in that spot in the morning on coming down from my room.

"Is this the new book?" she asked, holding it up.

"The very sheets, with precious annotations."

"I mean to take your advice;" and she tucked the little bundle under her arm. I congratulated her cordially, and ventured to make of my triumph, as I presumed to call it, a subject of pleasantry. But she was perfectly grave, and turned away from me, as she had presented herself, without a smile; after which I settled down to my quarto again, with the reflection that Mrs. Ambient was a queer woman. My triumph, too, suddenly seemed to me rather vain. A woman who could n't smile in the right place would never understand Mark Ambient. He came in at last in person, having brought the doctor back with him. "He was away from home," Mark said, "and I went after him, to where he was supposed to be. He had left the place, and I followed him to two or three others, which accounts for my delay." He was now with Mrs. Ambient looking at the child, and was to see Mark again before leaving the house. My host noticed, at the end of ten minutes, that the proof-

sheets of his new book had been removed from the table; and when I told him, in reply to his question as to what I knew about them, that Mrs. Ambient had carried them off to read, he turned almost pale for an instant with surprise. "What has suddenly made her so curious?" he exclaimed; and I was obliged to tell him that I was at the bottom of the mystery. I had had it on my conscience to assure her that she really ought to know of what her husband was capable. "Of what I am capable? *Elle ne s'en doute que trop!*" said Ambient, with a laugh; but he took my meddling very good-naturedly, and contented himself with adding that he was very much afraid she would burn up the sheets, with his emendations, of which he had no duplicate. The doctor paid a long visit in the nursery, and before he came down I retired to my own quarters, where I remained till dinner-time. On entering the drawing-room at this hour, I found Miss Ambient in possession, as she had been the evening before.

"I was right about Dolcino," she said, as soon as she saw me, with a strange little air of triumph. "He is really very ill."

"Very ill! Why, when I last saw him, at four o'clock, he was in fairly good form."

"There has been a change for the worse, very sudden and rapid, and when the doctor got here he found diphtheritic symptoms. He ought to have been called, as I knew, in the morning, and the child ought n't to have been brought into the garden."

"My dear lady, he was very happy there," I answered, much appalled.

"He would be happy anywhere. I have no doubt he is happy now, with his poor little throat in a state —" she dropped her voice as her brother came in, and Mark let us know that, as a matter of course, Mrs. Ambient would not appear. It was true that Dolcino had developed diphtheritic symptoms, but he was quiet for the present, and his mother was earnestly watching him. She was a perfect nurse, Mark said, and the doctor was coming back at ten o'clock. Our dinner was not very gay; Ambient was anxious and alarmed, and his sister irritated me by her constant tacit assumption, conveyed in the very way she nibbled her bread and sipped her wine, of having "told me so." I had had no disposition to deny anything she told me, and I could not see that her satisfaction in being justified by the event made poor Dolcino's throat any better. The truth is that, as the sequel proved, Miss Ambient had some of the qualities of the sibyl, and had therefore, perhaps, a right to the sibylline contortions. Her brother was so preoccupied that I felt my presence to be an indiscretion, and was sorry I had promised to remain over the morrow. I said to Mark that, evidently, I had better leave them in the morning; to which he replied that, on the contrary, if he was to pass the next days in the fidgets, my company would be an extreme relief to him. The fidgets had already begun for him, poor fellow; and as we sat in his study with our cigars

after dinner, he wandered to the door whenever he heard the sound of the doctor's wheels. Miss Ambient, who shared this apartment with us, gave me at such moments significant glances; she had gone upstairs before rejoining us to ask after the child. His mother and his nurse gave a tolerable account of him; but Miss Ambient found his fever high and his symptoms very grave. The doctor came at ten o'clock, and I went to bed after hearing from Mark that he saw no present cause for alarm. He had made every provision for the night, and was to return early in the morning.

I quitted my room at eight o'clock the next day, and, as I came downstairs, saw, through the open door of the house, Mrs. Ambient standing at the front gate of the grounds, in colloquy with the physician. She wore a white dressing-gown, but her shining hair was carefully tucked away in its net, and in the freshness of the morning, after a night of watching, she looked as much "the type of the lady" as her sister-in-law had described her. Her appearance, I suppose, ought to have reassured me; but I was still nervous and uneasy, so that I shrank from meeting her with the necessary question about Dolcino. None the less, however, was I impatient to learn how the morning found him; and, as Mrs. Ambient had not seen me, I passed into the grounds by a roundabout way, and, stopping at a further gate, hailed the doctor just as he was driving away. Mrs. Ambient had returned to the house before he got into his gig.

"Excuse me, but as a friend of the family, I should like very much to hear about the little boy."

The doctor, who was a stout, sharp man, looked at me from head to foot, and then he said, "I 'm sorry to say I have n't seen him."

"Have n't seen him?"

"Mrs. Ambient came down to meet me as I alighted, and told me that he was sleeping so soundly, after a restless night, that she did n't wish him disturbed. I assured her I would n't disturb him, but she said he was quite safe now and she could look after him herself."

"Thank you very much. Are you coming back?"

"No, sir; I 'll be hanged if I come back!" exclaimed Dr. Allingham, who was evidently very angry. And he started his horse again with the whip.

I wandered back into the garden, and five minutes later Miss Ambient came forth from the house to greet me. She explained that breakfast would not be served for some time, and that she wished to catch the doctor before he went away. I informed her that this functionary had come and departed, and I repeated to her what he had told me about his dismissal. This made Miss Ambient very serious, very serious indeed, and she sank into a bench, with dilated eyes, hugging her elbows with crossed arms. She indulged in many ejaculations, she confessed that she was infinitely perplexed, and she finally told me what her own last news of her nephew

had been. She had sat up very late, — after me, after Mark, — and before going to bed had knocked at the door of the child's room, which was opened to her by the nurse. This good woman had admitted her, and she had found Dolcino quiet, but flushed and "unnatural," with his mother sitting beside his bed. "She held his hand in one of hers," said Miss Ambient, "and in the other — what do you think? — the proof-sheets of Mark's new book! She was reading them there, intently: did you ever hear of anything so extraordinary? Such a very odd time to be reading an author whom she never could abide!" In her agitation Miss Ambient was guilty of this vulgarism of speech, and I was so impressed by her narrative that it was only in recalling her words later that I noticed the lapse. Mrs. Ambient had looked up from her reading with her finger on her lips — I recognized the gesture she had addressed to me in the afternoon — and, though the nurse was about to go to rest, had not encouraged her sister-in-law to relieve her of any part of her vigil. But certainly, then, Dolcino's condition was far from reassuring, — his poor little breathing was most painful; and what change could have taken place in him in those few hours that would justify Beatrice in denying the physician access to him? This was the moral of Miss Ambient's anecdote, the moral for herself at least. The moral for me, rather, was that it *was* a very singular time for Mrs. Ambient to be going into a novelist she had never appreciated,

and who had simply happened to be recommended to her by a young American she disliked. I thought of her sitting there in the sick-chamber in the still hours of the night, after the nurse had left her, turning over those pages of genius and wrestling with their magical influence.

I must relate very briefly the circumstances of the rest of my visit to Mark Ambient, — it lasted but a few hours longer, — and devote but three words to my later acquaintance with him. That lasted five years, — till his death, — and was full of interest, of satisfaction, and, I may add, of sadness. The main thing to be said with regard to it, is that I had a secret from him. I believe he never suspected it, though of this I am not absolutely sure. If he did, the line he had taken, the line of absolute negation of the matter to himself, shows an immense effort of the will. I may tell my secret now, giving it for what it is worth, now that Mark Ambient has gone, that he has begun to be alluded to as one of the famous early dead, and that his wife does not survive him; now, too, that Miss Ambient, whom I also saw at intervals during the years that followed, has, with her embroideries and her attitudes, her necromantic glances and strange intuitions, retired to a Sisterhood, where, as I am told, she is deeply immured and quite lost to the world.

Mark came in to breakfast after his sister and I had for some time been seated there. He shook hands with me in silence, kissed his sister, opened

his letters and newspapers, and pretended to drink his coffee. But I could see that these movements were mechanical, and I was little surprised when, suddenly, he pushed away everything that was before him, and, with his head in his hands and his elbows on the table, sat staring strangely at the cloth.

"What is the matter, *fratello mio?*" Miss Ambient inquired, peeping from behind the urn.

He answered nothing, but got up with a certain violence and strode to the window. We rose to our feet, his sister and I, by a common impulse, exchanging a glance of some alarm, while he stared for a moment into the garden. "In Heaven's name what has got possession of Beatrice?" he cried at last, turning round with an almost haggard face. And he looked from one of us to the other; the appeal was addressed to me as well as to his sister.

Miss Ambient gave a shrug. "My poor Mark, Beatrice is always — Beatrice!"

"She has locked herself up with the boy — bolted and barred the door; she refuses to let me come near him!" Ambient went on.

"She refused to let the doctor see him an hour ago!" Miss Ambient remarked, with intention, as they say on the stage.

"Refused to let the doctor see him? By heaven, I'll smash in the door!" And Mark brought his fist down upon the table, so that all the breakfast-service rang.

I begged Miss Ambient to go up and try to have speech of her sister-in-law, and I drew Mark out into the garden. "You're exceedingly nervous, and Mrs. Ambient is probably right," I said to him. "Women know; women should be supreme in such a situation. Trust a mother — a devoted mother, my dear friend!" With such words as these I tried to soothe and comfort him, and, marvellous to relate, I succeeded, with the help of many cigarettes, in making him walk about the garden and talk, or listen at least to my own ingenious chatter, for nearly an hour. At the end of this time Miss Ambient returned to us, with a very rapid step, holding her hand to her heart.

"Go for the doctor, Mark, go for the doctor this moment!"

"Is he dying? Has she killed him?" poor Ambient cried, flinging away his cigarette.

"I don't know what she has done! But she's frightened, and now she wants the doctor."

"He told me he would be hanged if he came back!" I felt myself obliged to announce.

"Precisely — therefore Mark himself must go for him, and not a messenger. You must see him, and tell him it's to save your child. The trap has been ordered — it 's ready."

"To save him? I'll save him, please God!" Ambient cried, bounding with his great strides across the lawn.

As soon as he had gone I felt that I ought to have

volunteered in his place, and I said as much to Miss Ambient; but she checked me by grasping my arm quickly, while we heard the wheels of the dog-cart rattle away from the gate. "He 's off — he 's off — and now I can think! To get him away — while I think — while I think!"

"While you think of what, Miss Ambient?"

"Of the unspeakable thing that has happened under this roof!"

Her manner was habitually that of such a prophetess of ill that my first impulse was to believe I must allow here for a great exaggeration. But in a moment I saw that her emotion was real. "Dolcino *is* dying then, — he is dead?"

"It 's too late to save him. His mother has let him die! I tell you that because you are sympathetic, because you have imagination," Miss Ambient was good enough to add, interrupting my expression of horror. "That 's why you had the idea of making her read Mark's new book!"

"What has that to do with it? I don't understand you; your accusation is monstrous."

"I see it all; I'm not stupid," Miss Ambient went on, heedless of the harshness of my tone. "It was the book that finished her; it was that decided her!"

"Decided her? Do you mean she has murdered her child?" I demanded, trembling at my own words.

"She sacrificed him; she determined to do nothing to make him live. Why else did she lock herself

up, why else did she turn away the doctor? The book gave her a horror; she determined to rescue him, — to prevent him from ever being touched. He had a crisis at two o'clock in the morning. I know that from the nurse, who had left her then, but whom, for a short time, she called back. Dolcino got much worse, but she insisted on the nurse's going back to bed, and after that she was alone with him for hours."

"Do you pretend that she has no pity, that she's insane?"

"She held him in her arms, she pressed him to her breast, not to see him; but she gave him no remedies; she did nothing the doctor ordered. Everything is there, untouched. She has had the honesty not even to throw the drugs away!"

I dropped upon the nearest bench, overcome with wonder and agitation, quite as much at Miss Ambient's terrible lucidity as at the charge she made against her sister-in-law. There was an amazing coherency in her story, and it was dreadful to me to see myself figuring in it as so proximate a cause.

"You are a very strange woman, and you say strange things."

"You think it necessary to protest, but you are quite ready to believe me. You have received an impression of my sister-in-law, you have guessed of what she is capable."

I do not feel bound to say what concession, on this point, I made to Miss Ambient, who went on to

relate to me that within the last half-hour Beatrice had had a revulsion; that she was tremendously frightened at what she had done; that her fright itself betrayed her; and that she would now give heaven and earth to save the child. "Let us hope she will!" I said, looking at my watch and trying to time poor Ambient; whereupon my companion repeated, in a singular tone, "Let us hope so!" When I asked her if she herself could do nothing, and whether she ought not to be with her sister-in-law, she replied, "You had better go and judge; she is like a wounded tigress!"

I never saw Mrs. Ambient till six months after this, and therefore cannot pretend to have verified the comparison. At the latter period she was again the type of the lady. "She'll treat him better after this," I remember Miss Ambient saying, in response to some quick outburst (on my part) of compassion for her brother. Although I had been in the house but thirty-six hours, this young lady had treated me with extraordinary confidence, and there was therefore a certain demand which, as an intimate, I might make of her. I extracted from her a pledge that she would never say to her brother what she had just said to me; she would leave him to form his own theory of his wife's conduct. She agreed with me that there was misery enough in the house, without her contributing a new anguish, and that Mrs. Ambient's proceedings might be explained, to her husband's mind, by the extravagance of a jealous devotion. Poor Mark came back

with the doctor much sooner than we could have hoped, but we knew, five minutes afterwards, that they arrived too late. Poor little Dolcino was more exquisitely beautiful in death than he had been in life. Mrs. Ambient's grief was frantic; she lost her head and said strange things. As for Mark's — but I will not speak of that. *Basta*, as he used to say. Miss Ambient kept her secret, — I have already had occasion to say that she had her good points, — but it rankled in her conscience like a guilty participation, and, I imagine, had something to do with her retiring ultimately to a Sisterhood. And, *à propos* of consciences, the reader is now in a position to judge of my compunction for my effort to convert Mrs. Ambient. I ought to mention that the death of her child in some degree converted her. When the new book came out — it was long delayed — she read it over as a whole, and her husband told me that a few months before her death, — she failed rapidly after losing her son, sank into a consumption, and faded away at Mentone, — during those few supreme weeks she even dipped into *Beltraffio*.

# PANDORA.

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## PART I.

It has long been the custom of the North German Lloyd steamers, which convey passengers from Bremen to New York, to anchor for several hours in the pleasant port of Southampton, where their human cargo receives many additions. An intelligent young German, Count Otto Vogelstein, hardly knew a few years ago whether to condemn this custom or approve it. He leaned over the bulwarks of the *Donau* as the American passengers crossed the plank, — the travellers who embark at Southampton are mainly of that nationality, — and curiously, indifferently, vaguely, through the smoke of his cigar, saw them absorbed in the huge capacity of the ship, where he had the agreeable consciousness that his own nest was comfortably made. To watch from a point of vantage the struggles of later comers — of the uninformed, the unprovided, the bewildered — is an occupation not devoid of sweetness, and there was nothing to mitigate the complacency with which our young friend gave himself up to it; nothing, that is, save a natural benevolence which had not yet been extin-

guished by the consciousness of official greatness. For Count Vogelstein was official, as I think you would have seen from the straightness of his back, the lustre of his light, elegant spectacles, and something discreet and diplomatic in the curve of his mustache, which looked as if it might well contribute to the principal function, as cynics say, of the lips, — the concealment of thought. He had been appointed to the secretaryship of the German legation at Washington, and in these first days of the autumn he was going to take possession of his post. He was a model character for such a purpose, — serious, civil, ceremonious, stiff, inquisitive, stuffed with knowledge, and convinced that at present the German empire is the country in the world most highly evolved. He was quite aware, however, of the claims of the United States, and that this portion of the globe presented an enormous field for study.

The process of inquiry had already begun, in spite of his having as yet spoken to none of his fellow-passengers, for Vogelstein inquired not only with his tongue, — he inquired with his eyes (that is, with his spectacles), with his ears, with his nose, with his palate, with all his senses and organs. He was an excellent young man, and his only fault was that he had not a high sense of humor. He had enough, however, to suspect this deficiency, and he was aware that he was about to visit a highly humorous people. This suspicion gave him a certain mistrust of what might be said of him; and if circumspection is

the essence of diplomacy, our young aspirant promised well. His mind contained several millions of facts, packed too closely together for the light breeze of the imagination to draw through the mass. He was impatient to report himself to his superior in Washington, and the loss of time in an English port could only incommode him, inasmuch as the study of English institutions was no part of his mission. But, on the other hand, the day was charming; the blue sea, in Southampton water, pricked all over with light, had no movement but that of its infinite shimmer. And he was by no means sure that he should be happy in the United States, where doubtless he should find himself soon enough disembarked. He knew that this was not an important question, and happiness was an unscientific term, which he was ashamed to use even in the silence of his thoughts. But lost in the inconsiderate crowd, and feeling himself neither in his own country nor in that to which he was in a manner accredited, he was reduced to his mere personality; so that, for the moment, to fill himself out, he tried to have an opinion on the subject of this delay to which the German steamer was subjected in English waters. It appeared to him that it might be proved to be considerably greater than the occasion demanded.

Count Vogelstein was still young enough in diplomacy to think it necessary to have opinions. He had a good many, indeed, which had been formed without difficulty; they had been received ready-made from a

line of ancestors who knew what they liked. This was, of course, — and he would have admitted it, — an unscientific way of furnishing one's mind. Our young man was a stiff conservative, a Junker of Junkers; he thought modern democracy a temporary phase, and expected to find many arguments against it in the United States. In regard to these things, it was a pleasure to him to feel that, with his complete training, he had been taught thoroughly to appreciate the nature of evidence. The ship was heavily laden with German emigrants, whose mission in the United States differed considerably from Count Otto's. They hung over the bulwarks, densely grouped; they leaned forward on their elbows for hours, with their shoulders on a level with their ears; the men in furred caps, smoking long-bowled pipes; the women with babies hidden in their shawls. Some were yellow Germans and some were black, and all of them looked greasy and matted with the sea damp. They were destined to swell the current of western democracy; and Count Vogelstein doubtless said to himself that they would not improve its quality. Their numbers, however, were striking, and I know not what he thought of the nature of *this* evidence.

The passengers who came on board at Southampton were not of the greasy class; they were for the most part American families who had been spending the summer, or a longer period, in Europe. They had a great deal of luggage, innumerable bags and rugs and hampers and sea-chairs, and were composed largely of

ladies of various ages, a little pale with anticipation, wrapped in striped shawls and crowned with very high hats and feathers. They darted to and fro across the gangway, looking for each other and for their scattered parcels; they separated and reunited, they exclaimed and declared, they eyed with dismay the occupants of the steerage, who seemed numerous enough to sink the vessel, and their voices sounded faint and far as they rose to Vogelstein's ear over the tarred sides of the ship. He observed that in the new contingent there were many young girls, and he remembered what a lady in Dresden had once said to him, — that America was a country of girls. He wondered whether he should like that, and reflected that it would be a question to study, like everything else. He had known in Dresden an American family, in which there were three daughters who used to skate with the officers, and some of the ladies now coming on board seemed to him of that same habit, except that in the Dresden days feathers were not worn quite so high.

At last the ship began to creak and slowly budge, and the delay at Southampton came to an end. The gangway was removed, and the vessel indulged in the awkward evolutions which were to detach her from the land. Count Vogelstein had finished his cigar, and he spent a long time in walking up and down the upper deck. The charming English coast passed before him, and he felt that this was the last of the old world. The American coast also might be

pretty,—he hardly knew what one would expect of an American coast; but he was sure it would be different. Differences, however, were half the charm of travel. As yet, indeed, there were very few on the steamer. Most of his fellow-passengers appeared to be of the same persuasion, and that persuasion the least to be mistaken. They were Jews and commercial, to a man. And by this time they had lighted their cigars and put on all manner of seafaring caps, some of them with big ear-lappets, which somehow had the effect of bringing out their peculiar facial type. At last the new voyagers began to emerge from below and to look about them, vaguely, with that suspicious expression of face which is to be perceived in the newly embarked, and which, as directed to the receding land, resembles that of a person who begins to perceive that he is the victim of a trick. Earth and ocean, in such glances, are made the subject of a general objection, and many travellers, in these circumstances, have an air at once duped and superior, which seems to say that they could easily go ashore if they would.

It still wanted two hours of dinner, and, by the time Vogelstein's long legs had measured three or four miles on the deck he was ready to settle himself in his sea-chair and draw from his pocket a Tauchnitz novel by an American author, whose pages, he had been assured, would help to prepare him. On the back of his chair his name was painted in rather large letters, this being a precaution taken at

the recommendation of a friend, who had told him that on the American steamers the passengers — especially the ladies — thought nothing of pilfering one's little comforts. His friend had even said that in his place he would have his coronet painted. This cynical adviser had added that the Americans are greatly impressed by a coronet. I know not whether it was scepticism or modesty, but Count Vogelstein had omitted this ensign of his rank; the precious piece of furniture which, on the Atlantic voyage, is depended upon to remain steady among general concussions was emblazoned simply with his title and name. It happened, however, that the blazonry was huge; the back of the chair was covered with enormous German characters. This time there can be no doubt: it was modesty that caused the secretary of the legation, in placing himself, to turn this portion of his seat outward, away from the eyes of his companions, — to present it to the balustrade of the deck. The ship was passing the Needles, — the beautiful outermost point of the Isle of Wight. Certain tall white cones of rock rose out of the purple sea; they flushed in the afternoon light, and their vague rosiness gave them a kind of human expression, in face of the cold expanse toward which the ship was turned; they seemed to say farewell, to be the last note of a peopled world. Vogelstein saw them very comfortably from his place, and after a while he turned his eyes to the other quarter, where the sky and sea between them managed to

make so poor an opposition. Even his American novelist was more amusing than that, and he prepared to return to this author. In the great curve which it described, however, his glance was arrested by the figure of a young lady who had just ascended to the deck, and who paused at the mouth of the companion-way.

In itself this was not an extraordinary phenomenon; but what attracted Vogelstein's attention was the fact that the young person appeared to have fixed her eyes on him. She was slim, brightly dressed, and rather pretty; Vogelstein remembered in a moment that he had noticed her among the people on the wharf at Southampton. She very soon saw that he was looking at her; whereupon she began to move along the deck with a step which seemed to indicate that she was coming straight toward him. Vogelstein had time to wonder whether she could be one of the girls he had known at Dresden; but he presently reflected that they would now be much older than this. It was true they came straight toward one, like that. This young lady, however, was no longer looking at him, and, though she passed near him, it was now tolerably clear that she had come upstairs simply to take a general survey. She was a quick, handsome, competent girl, and she wished to see what one could think of the ship, of the weather, of the appearance of England, from such a position as that; possibly even of one's fellow-passengers. She satisfied herself promptly on these points, and then she

looked about, while she walked, as if she were in search of a missing object; so that Vogelstein presently saw this was what she really had come up for. She passed near him again, and this time she almost stopped, with her eyes bent upon him attentively. He thought her conduct remarkable, even after he had perceived that it was not at his face, with its yellow mustache, she was looking, but at the chair on which he was seated. Then those words of his friend came back to him, — the speech about the people, especially the ladies, on the American steamers taking to themselves one's little belongings. Especially the ladies, he might well say; for here was one who apparently wished to pull from under him the very chair he was sitting on. He was afraid she would ask him for it, so he pretended to read, without meeting her eye. He was conscious that she hovered near him, and he was curious to see what she would do. It seemed to him strange that such a nice-looking girl (for her appearance was really charming) should endeavor by arts so flagrant to attract the attention of a secretary of legation. At last it became evident to him that she was trying to look round a corner, as it were, trying to see what was written on the back of his chair. "She wants to find out my name; she wants to see who I am!" This reflection passed through his mind, and caused him to raise his eyes. They rested on her own, — which for an appreciable moment she did not withdraw. The latter were

brilliant and expressive, and surmounted a delicate aquiline nose, which, though pretty, was perhaps just a trifle too hawk-like. It was the oddest coincidence in the world; the story Vogelstein had taken up treated of a flighty, forward little American girl, who plants herself in front of a young man in the garden of an hotel. Was not the conduct of this young lady a testimony to the truthfulness of the tale, and was not Vogelstein himself in the position of the young man in the garden? That young man ended by speaking to his aggressor (as she might be called), and after a very short hesitation Vogelstein followed his example. "If she wants to know who I am, she is welcome," he said to himself; and he got out of the chair, seized it by the back, and, turning it round, exhibited the superscription to the girl. She colored slightly, but she smiled and read his name, while Vogelstein raised his hat.

"I am much obliged to you. That's all right," she remarked, as if the discovery had made her very happy.

It seemed to him indeed all right that he should be Count Otto Vogelstein; this appeared even a rather flippant mode of disposing of the fact. By way of rejoinder, he asked her if she desired his seat.

"I am much obliged to you; of course not. I thought you had one of our chairs, and I did n't like to ask you. It looks exactly like one of ours;

not so much now as when you sit in it. Please sit down again. I don't want to trouble you. We have lost one of ours, and I have been looking for it everywhere. They look so much alike; you can't tell till you see the back. Of course I see there will be no mistake about yours," the young lady went on, with a frank smile. "But we have got such a small name — you can scarcely see it," she added, with the same friendly intention. "Our name is Day. If you see that on anything, I should be so obliged if you would tell me. It is n't for myself, it 's for my mother; she is so dependent on her chair, and that one I am looking for pulls out so beautifully. Now that you sit down again and hide the lower part, it does look just like ours. Well, it must be somewhere. You must excuse me; I am much obliged to you."

This was a long and even confidential speech for a young woman, presumably unmarried, to make to a perfect stranger; but Miss Day acquitted herself of it with perfect simplicity and self-possession. She held up her head and stepped away, and Vogelstein could see that the foot she pressed upon the clean, smooth deck was slender and shapely. He watched her disappear through the trap by which she had ascended, and he felt more than ever like the young man in his American tale. The girl in the present case was older and not so pretty, as he could easily judge, for the image of her smiling eyes and speaking lips still hovered before him. He went back to his book with the feeling that it would give him some

information about her. This was rather illogical, but it indicated a certain amount of curiosity on the part of Count Vogelstein. The girl in the book had a mother, it appeared, and so had this young lady; the former had also a brother, and he now remembered that he had noticed a young man on the wharf, — a young man in a high hat and a white overcoat, — who seemed united to Miss Day by this natural tie. And there was some one else too, as he gradually recollected, an older man, also in a high hat, but in a black overcoat, — in black altogether, — who completed the group, and who was presumably the head of the family. These reflections would indicate that Count Vogelstein read his volume of Tauchnitz rather interruptedly. Moreover, they represented a considerable waste of time; for was he not to be afloat in an oblong box, for ten days, with such people, and could it be doubted that he should see at least enough of them?

It may as well be said without delay that he saw a great deal of them. I have depicted with some precision the circumstances under which he made the acquaintance of Miss Day, because the event had a certain importance for this candid Teuton; but I must pass briefly over the incidents that immediately followed it. He wondered what it was open to him, after such an introduction, to do with regard to her, and he determined he would push through his American tale and discover what the hero did. But in a very short time he perceived that Miss Day had nothing in common with the heroine of that work,

save a certain local quality and the fact that the male sex was not terrible to her. Her local quality, indeed, he took rather on trust than apprehended for himself. She was native to a small town in the interior of the American continent, and a lady from New York, who was on the ship, and with whom he had a good deal of conversation, assured him Miss Day was exceedingly provincial. How this lady ascertained the fact did not appear, for Vogelstein observed that she held no communication with the girl. It is true that she threw some light on her processes by remarking to him that certain Americans could tell immediately who other Americans were, leaving him to judge whether or no she herself belonged to the discriminating class. She was a Mrs. Dangerfield, a handsome, confidential, insinuating woman, and Vogelstein's talk with her took a turn that was almost philosophic. She convinced him, rather effectually, that even in a great democracy there are human differences, and that American life was full of social distinctions, of delicate shades, which foreigners are often too stupid to perceive. Did he suppose that every one knew every one else, in the biggest country in the world, and that one was not as free to choose one's company there as in the most monarchical communities? She laughed these ideas to scorn, as Vogelstein tucked her beautiful furred coverlet (they reclined together a great deal in their elongated chairs) well over her feet. How free an American lady was to choose her com-

pany she abundantly proved by not knowing any one on the steamer but Count Otto.

He could see for himself that Mr. and Mrs. Day had not her peculiar stamp. They were fat, plain, serious people, who sat side by side on the deck for hours, looking straight before them. Mrs. Day had a white face, large cheeks and small eyes; her forehead was surrounded with a multitude of little tight black curls, and her lips moved as if she had always a lozenge in her mouth. She wore entwined about her head an article which Mrs. Dangerfield spoke of as a "nuby," — a knitted pink scarf which covered her coiffure and encircled her neck, having among its convolutions a hole for her perfectly expressionless face. Her hands were folded on her stomach, and in her still, swathed figure her little bead-like eyes, which occasionally changed their direction, alone represented life. Her husband had a stiff gray beard on his chin, and a bare, spacious upper lip, to which constant shaving had imparted a kind of hard glaze. His eyebrows were thick and his nostrils wide, and when he was uncovered, in the saloon, it was visible that his grizzled hair was dense and perpendicular. He might have looked rather grim and truculent, if it had not been for the mild, familiar, accommodating gaze with which his large, light-colored pupils — the leisurely eyes of a silent man — appeared to consider surrounding objects. He was evidently more friendly than fierce, but he was more diffident than friendly. He liked to look at you, but he would not have pre-

tended to understand you much nor to classify you, and would have been sorry that it should put you under an obligation. He and his wife spoke sometimes, but they seldom talked, and there was something passive and patient about them, as if they were victims of a spell. The spell, however, was evidently pleasant; it was the fascination of prosperity, the confidence of security, which sometimes makes people arrogant, but which had had such a different effect upon this simple, satisfied pair, in which further development of every kind appeared to have been arrested.

Mrs. Dangerfield told Count Vogelstein that every morning, after breakfast, the hour at which he wrote his journal, in his cabin, the old couple were guided upstairs and installed in their customary corner by Pandora. This she had learned to be the name of their elder daughter, and she was immensely amused by her discovery. "Pandora" — that was in the highest degree typical; it placed them in the social scale, if other evidence had been wanting; you could tell that a girl was from the interior — the mysterious interior about which Vogelstein's imagination was now quite excited — when she had such a name as that. This young lady managed the whole family, even a little the small beflounced sister, who, with bold, pretty, innocent eyes, a torrent of fair, silky hair, a crimson fez, such as is worn by male Turks, very much askew on top of it, and a way of galloping and straddling about the ship in any company

she could pick up (she had long, thin legs, very short skirts, and stockings of every tint), was going home, in elaborate French clothes, to resume an interrupted education. Pandora overlooked and directed her relatives; Vogelstein could see that for himself, could see that she was very active and decided, that she had in a high degree the sentiment of responsibility, and settled most of the questions that could come up for a family from the interior.

The voyage was remarkably fine, and day after day it was possible to sit there under the salt sky and feel one's self rounding the great curves of the globe. The long deck made a white spot in the sharp black circle of the ocean and in the intense sea-light, while the shadow of the smoke-streamers trembled on the familiar floor, the shoes of fellow-passengers, distinctive now, and in some cases irritating, passed and repassed, accompanied, in the air so tremendously "open," that rendered all voices weak and most remarks rather flat, by fragments of opinion on the run of the ship. Vogelstein by this time had finished his little American story, and now definitely judged that Pandora Day was not at all like the heroine. She was of quite another type; much more serious and preoccupied, and not at all keen, as he had supposed, about making the acquaintance of gentlemen. Her speaking to him that first afternoon had been, he was bound to believe, an incident without importance for herself; in spite of her having followed it up the next day by the remark, thrown

at him as she passed, with a smile that was almost fraternal: "It's all right, sir! I have found that old chair." After this she had not spoken to him again, and had scarcely looked at him. She read a great deal, and almost always French books, in fresh yellow paper; not the lighter forms of that literature, but a volume of Sainte-Beuve, of Renan, or at the most, in the way of dissipation, of Alfred de Musset. She took frequent exercise, and almost always walked alone, not, apparently, having made many friends on the ship, and being without the resource of her parents, who, as has been related, never budged out of the cosey corner in which she planted them for the day.

Her brother was always in the smoking-room, where Vogelstein observed him, in very tight clothes, his neck encircled with a collar like a palisade. He had a sharp little face, which was not disagreeable; he smoked enormous cigars, and began his drinking early in the day: but his appearance gave no sign of these excesses. As regards euchre and poker, and the other distractions of the place, he was guilty of none. He evidently understood such games in perfection, for he used to watch the players, and even at moments impartially advise them; but Vogelstein never saw the cards in his hand. He was referred to as regards disputed points, and his opinion carried the day. He took little part in the conversation, usually much relaxed, that prevailed in the smoking-room, but from time to time he made, in his soft, flat, youth-

ful voice, a remark which every one paused to listen to, and which was greeted with roars of laughter. Vogelstein, well as he knew English, could rarely catch the joke; but he could see, at least, that these were the most transcendent flights of American humor. The young man, in his way, was very remarkable, for, as Vogelstein heard some one say once, after the laughter had subsided, he was only nineteen. If his sister did not resemble the dreadful little girl in the tale I have so often mentioned, there was, for Vogelstein, at least an analogy between young Mr. Day and a certain small brother, — a candy-loving Madison, Hamilton, or Jefferson, — who, in the Tauchnitz volume, was attributed to that unfortunate maid. This was what the little Madison would have grown up to at nineteen, and the improvement was greater than might have been expected.

The days were long, but the voyage was short, and it had almost come to an end before Count Vogelstein yielded to an attraction peculiar in its nature, and finally irresistible, and in spite of Mrs. Dangerfield's warnings, sought an opportunity for a little continuous talk with Miss Pandora Day. To mention this sentiment without mentioning sundry other impressions of his voyage, with which it had nothing to do, is perhaps to violate proportion and give a false idea; but to pass it by would be still more unjust. The Germans, as we know, are a transcendental people, and there was at last a vague fascination for Vogel-

stein in this quick, bright, silent girl, who could smile and turn vocal in an instant, who imparted a sort of originality to the filial character, and whose profile was delicate as she bent it over a volume which she cut as she read, or presented it, in absent-minded attitudes, at the side of the ship, to the horizon they had left behind. But he felt it to be a pity, as regards a possible acquaintance with her, that her parents should be heavy little burghers, that her brother should not correspond to Vogelstein's conception of a young man of the upper class, and that her sister should be a Daisy Miller *en herbe.* Repeatedly warned by Mrs. Dangerfield, the young diplomatist was doubly careful as to the relations he might form at the beginning of his sojourn in the United States. Mrs. Dangerfield reminded him, and he had made the observation himself, in other capitals, that the first year, and even the second, is the time for prudence. One is ignorant of proportions and values; one is exposed, and thankful for attention, and one may give one's self away to people who afterwards prove a great incumbrance. Mrs. Dangerfield struck a note which resounded in Vogelstein's imagination. She assured him that if he did n't "look out" he would be falling in love with some American girl with an impossible family. In America, when one fell in love with a girl, there was nothing to be done but marry her, and what should he say, for instance, to finding himself a near relation of Mr. and Mrs. P. W. Day? (These were the initials inscribed

on the back of the two chairs of that couple.) Vogelstein felt the peril, for he could immediately think of a dozen men he knew who had married American girls. There appeared now to be a constant danger of marrying the American girl; it was something one had to reckon with, like the railway, the telegraph, the discovery of dynamite, the Chassepôt rifle, the Socialistic spirit; it was one of the complications of modern life.

It would doubtless be too much to say that Vogelstein was afraid of falling in love with Pandora Day; a young woman who was not strikingly beautiful, and with whom he had talked, in all, but ten minutes. But, as I say, he went so far as to wish that the human belongings of a girl whose independence appeared to have no taint either of fastness, as they said in England, or of subversive opinion, and whose nose was so very well bred, should not be a little more distinguished. There was something almost comical in her attitude toward these belongings; she appeared to regard them as a care, but not as an interest; it was as if they had been intrusted to her honor, and she had engaged to convey them safe to a certain point; she was detached and inadvertent; then, suddenly, she remembered, repented, and came back to tuck her parents into their blankets, to alter the position of her mother's umbrella, to tell them something about the run of the ship. These little offices were usually performed deftly, rapidly, with the minimum of words, and when their daughter came

near them Mr. and Mrs. Day closed their eyes placidly, like a pair of household dogs who expect to be scratched.

One morning she brought up the captain to present to them; she appeared to have a private and independent acquaintance with this officer, and the introduction to her parents had the air of a sudden inspiration. It was not so much an introduction as an exhibition, as if she were saying to him: "This is what they look like; see how comfortable I make them. Aren't they rather queer little people? But they leave me perfectly free. Oh, I can assure you of that. Besides, you must see it for yourself." Mr. and Mrs. Day looked up at the captain with very little change of countenance; then looked at each other in the same way. He saluted and bent toward them a moment; but Pandora shook her head, she seemed to be answering for them; she made little gestures as if she were explaining to the captain some of their peculiarities, as, for instance, that they would n't speak. They closed their eyes at last; she appeared to have a kind of mesmeric influence on them, and Miss Day walked away with the commander of the ship, who treated her with evident consideration, bowing very low, in spite of his supreme position, when, presently after, they separated. Vogelstein could see that she was capable of making an impression; and the moral of our episode is that in spite of Mrs. Dangerfield, in spite of the resolutions of his prudence, in spite of the meagreness of the conversation that had passed between them, in

spite of Mr. and Mrs. Day and the young man in the smoking-room, she had fixed his attention.

It was the evening after the scene with the captain that he joined her, awkwardly, abruptly, irresistibly, on the deck, where she was pacing to and fro alone, the evening being mild and brilliant and the stars remarkably fine. There were scattered talkers and smokers and couples, unrecognizable, that moved quickly through the gloom. The vessel dipped with long, regular pulsations; vague and spectral, under the stars, with its swaying pinnacles spotted here and there with lights, it seemed to rush through the darkness faster than by day. Vogelstein had come up to walk, and as the girl brushed past him he distinguished Pandora's face (with Mrs. Dangerfield he always spoke of her as Pandora) under the veil that seemed intended to protect it from the sea-damp. He stopped, turned, hurried after her, threw away his cigar, and asked her if she would do him the honor to accept his arm. She declined his arm, but accepted his company, and he walked with her for an hour. They had a great deal of talk, and he remembered afterwards some of the things she said. There was now a certainty of the ship getting into dock the next morning but one, and this pretext afforded an obvious topic. Some of Miss Day's expressions struck him as singular, but, of course, as he knew, his knowledge of English was not nice enough to give him a perfect measure.

"I am not in a hurry to arrive; I am very happy

here," she said. "I am afraid I shall have such a time putting my people through."

"Putting them through?"

"Through the Custom-house. We have made so many purchases. Well, I have written to a friend to come down, and perhaps he can help us. He is very well acquainted with the head. Once I 'm chalked, I don't care. I feel like a kind of black-board by this time, any way. We found them awful in Germany."

Vogelstein wondered whether the friend she had written to were her lover, and if she were engaged to him, especially when she alluded to him again as "that gentleman that is coming down." He asked her about her travels, her impressions, whether she had been long in Europe, and what she liked best, and she told him that they had gone abroad, she and her family, for a little fresh experience. Though he found her very intelligent, he suspected she gave this as a reason because he was a German and she had heard that Germans were fond of culture. He wondered what form of culture Mr. and Mrs. Day had brought back from Italy, Greece, and Palestine (they had travelled for two years and been everywhere), especially when their daughter said: "I wanted father and mother to see the best things. I kept them three hours on the Acropolis. I guess they won't forget that!" Perhaps it was of Phidias and Pericles they were thinking, Vogelstein reflected, as they sat ruminating in their rugs. Pandora remarked also that she

wanted to show her little sister everything while she was young; remarkable sights made so much more impression when the mind was fresh; she had read something of that sort in Goethe, somewhere. She had wanted to come herself, when she was her sister's age; but her father was in business then, and they could n't leave Utica. Vogelstein thought of the little sister frisking over the Parthenon and the Mount of Olives, and sharing for two years, the years of the school-room, this extraordinary pilgrimage of her parents, and wondered whether Goethe's dictum had been justified in this case. He asked Pandora if Utica were the seat of her family, if it were a pleasant place, if it would be an interesting city for him, as a stranger, to see. His companion replied frankly that it was horrid, but added that all the same she would ask him to "come and visit us at our home," if it were not that they should probably soon leave it.

"Ah! You are going to live elsewhere?"

"Well, I am working for New York. I flatter myself I have loosened them, while we have been away. They won't find Utica the same; that was my idea. I want a big place, and, of course, Utica—" and the girl broke off with a little sigh.

"I suppose Utica is small?" Vogelstein suggested.

"Well, no, it's middle-sized. I hate anything middling," said Pandora Day. She gave a light, dry laugh, tossing back her head a little as she made this declaration. And looking at her askance in the

dusk, as she trod the deck that vaguely swayed, he thought there was something in her air and port that carried out such a spirit.

"What is her social position?" he inquired of Mrs. Dangerfield the next day. "I can't make it out at all, it is so contradictory. She strikes me as having much cultivation and much spirit. Her appearance, too, is very nice. Yet her parents are little burghers. That is easily seen."

"Oh, social position," Mrs. Dangerfield exclaimed, nodding two or three times rather portentously. "What big expressions you use! Do you think everybody in the world has a social position? That is reserved for an infinitely small majority of mankind. You can't have a social position at Utica, any more than you can have an opera-box. Pandora has n't got any; where should she have got it? Poor girl, it is n't fair of you to ask such questions as that."

"Well," said Vogelstein, "if she is of the lower class, it seems to me very — very —" and he paused a moment, as he often paused in speaking English, looking for his word.

"Very what, Count Vogelstein?"

"Very significant, very representative."

"Oh, dear, she is n't of the lower class," Mrs. Dangerfield murmured, helplessly.

"What is she, then?"

"Well, I 'm bound to admit that since I was at home last she is a novelty. A girl like that, with such people, it 's a new type."

"I like novelties," said Count Vogelstein, smiling, with an air of considerable resolution. He could not, however, be satisfied with an explanation that only begged the question; and, when they disembarked in New York, he felt, even amid the confusion of the wharf and the heaps of disembowelled baggage, a certain acuteness of regret at the idea that Pandora and her family were about to vanish into the unknown. He had a consolation, however: it was apparent that for some reason or other — illness or absence from town — the gentleman to whom she had written had not, as she said, come down. Vogelstein was glad — he could n't have told you why — that this sympathetic person had failed her; even though without him Pandora had to engage single-handed with the United States Custom-house. Vogelstein's first impression of the western world was received on the landing-place of the German steamers at Jersey City, — a huge wooden shed, covering a wooden wharf which resounded under the feet, palisaded with rough-hewn, slanting piles, and bestrewn with masses of heterogeneous luggage. At one end, toward the town, was a row of tall, painted palings, behind which he could distinguish a press of hackney-coachmen, brandishing their whips and waiting their victims, while their voices rose, incessant, with a sharp, strange sound, at once fierce and familiar. The whole place, behind the fence, appeared to bristle and resound. Out there was America, Vogelstein said to himself, and he looked toward it with a sense that he ought to

muster resolution. On the wharf people were rushing about amid their trunks, pulling their things together, trying to unite their scattered parcels. They were heated and angry, or else quite bewildered and discouraged. The few that had succeeded in collecting their battered boxes had an air of flushed indifference to the efforts of their neighbors, not even looking at people with whom they had been intimate on the steamer. A detachment of the officers of the customs was in attendance, and energetic passengers were engaged in attempts to drag them toward their luggage or to drag heavy pieces toward them. These functionaries were good-natured and taciturn, except when occasionally they remarked to a passenger whose open trunk stared up at them, imploring, that they were afraid the voyage had been "rather glassy." They had a friendly, leisurely, speculative way of performing their office, and if they perceived a victim's name written on the portmanteau they addressed him by it, in a tone of old acquaintance. Vogelstein found, however, that if they were familiar, they were not indiscreet. He had heard that in America all public functionaries were the same, that there was not a different *tenue*, as they said in France, for different positions, and he wondered whether at Washington the President and ministers, whom he expected to see, would be like that.

He was diverted from these speculations by the sight of Mr. and Mrs. Day, who were seated side by side upon a trunk, encompassed, apparently, by the

accumulations of their tour. Their faces expressed more consciousness of surrounding objects than he had hitherto perceived, and there was an air of placid expansion in the mysterious couple which suggested that this consciousness was agreeable. Mr. and Mrs. Day, as they would have said, were glad to get back. At a little distance, on the edge of the dock, Vogelstein remarked their son, who had found a place where, between the sides of two big ships, he could see the ferry-boats pass; the large, pyramidal, low-laden ferry-boats of American waters. He stood there, patient and considering, with his small, neat foot on a coil of rope, his back to everything that had been disembarked, his neck elongated in its polished cylinder, while the fragrance of his big cigar mingled with the odor of the rotting piles, and his little sister beside him hugged a huge post, and tried to see how far she could crane over the water without falling in. Vogelstein's servant had gone in pursuit of an examiner; he had got his things together and was waiting to be released, fully expecting that for a person of his importance the ceremony would be brief. Before it began, he said a word to young Mr. Day, taking off his hat at the same time to the little girl, whom he had not yet greeted, and who dodged his salute by swinging herself boldly outward to the dangerous side of the pier. She was not much "formed" yet, but she was evidently as light as a feather.

"I see you are kept waiting, like me. It is very tiresome," Mr. Vogelstein said.

The young man answered without looking behind him. "As soon as we begin we shall go straight. My sister has written to a gentleman to come down."

"I have looked for Miss Day to bid her good-by," Vogelstein went on; "but I don't see her."

"I guess she has gone to meet that gentleman; he 's a great friend of hers."

"I guess he 's her lover!" the little girl broke out. "She was always writing to him, in Europe."

Her brother puffed his cigar in silence for a moment. "That was only for this. I 'll tell on you," he presently added.

But the younger Miss Day gave no heed to his announcement; she addressed herself to Vogelstein. "This is New York; I like it better than Utica."

Vogelstein had no time to reply, for his servant had arrived with one of the emissaries of the customs; but as he turned away he wondered, in the light of the child's preference, about the towns of the interior. He was very well treated. The officer who took him in hand, and who had a large straw hat and a diamond breastpin, was quite a man of the world, and in reply to the formal declarations of the Count, only said, "Well, I guess it 's all right; I guess I 'll just pass you;" and he distributed freely a dozen chalk-marks. The servant had unlocked and unbuckled various pieces, and while he was closing them the officer stood there wiping his forehead and conversing with Vogelstein. "First visit to our country, sir? — quite alone — no ladies? Of course the ladies are what we

are after." It was in this manner he expressed himself, while the young diplomatist wondered what he was waiting for, and whether he ought to slip something into his palm. But Vogelstein's visitor left him only a moment in suspense; he presently turned away, with the remark, very quietly uttered, that he hoped the Count would make quite a stay; upon which the young man saw how wrong he should have been to offer him a tip. It was simply the American manner, and it was very amicable, after all. Vogelstein's servant had secured a porter, with a truck, and he was about to leave the place when he saw Pandora Day dart out of the crowd and address herself, with much eagerness, to the functionary who had just liberated him. She had an open letter in her hand, which she gave him to read, and he cast his eyes over it, deliberately, stroking his beard. Then she led him away, to where her parents sat upon their luggage. Vogelstein sent off his servant with the porter, and followed Pandora, to whom he really wished to speak a word of farewell. The last thing they had said to each other on the ship was that they should meet again on shore. It seemed improbable, however, that the meeting would occur anywhere but just here on the dock; inasmuch as Pandora was decidedly not in society, where Vogelstein would be, of course, and as, if Utica was not — he had her sharp little sister's word for it — as agreeable as what was about him there, he would be hanged if he would go to Utica. He overtook Pandora quickly; she was in the act of

introducing the agent of the customs to her parents, quite in the same manner in which she had introduced the captain of the steamer. Mr. and Mrs. Day got up and shook hands with him, and they evidently all prepared to have a little talk. "I should like to introduce you to my brother and sister," he heard the girl say, and he saw her look about her for these appendages. He caught her eye as she did so, and advanced, with his hand outstretched, reflecting, the while, that evidently the Americans, whom he had always heard described as silent and practical, were not unversed in certain social arts. They dawdled and chattered like so many Neapolitans.

"Good-by, Count Vogelstein," said Pandora, who was a little flushed with her various exertions, but did not look the worse for it. "I hope you 'll have a splendid time, and appreciate our country."

"I hope you 'll get through all right," Vogelstein answered, smiling and feeling himself already more idiomatic.

"That gentleman is sick that I wrote to," she rejoined; "is n't it too bad? But he sent me down a letter to a friend of his, — one of the examiners, — and I guess we won't have any trouble. Mr. Lansing, let me make you acquainted with Count Vogelstein," she went on, presenting to her fellow-passenger the wearer of the straw hat and the breast-pin, who shook hands with the young German as if he had never seen him before. Vogelstein's heart rose for an instant to his throat; he thanked his stars that he

had not offered a tip to the friend of a gentleman who had often been mentioned to him, and who had been described by a member of Pandora's family as her lover.

"It's a case of ladies this time," Mr. Lansing remarked to Vogelstein, with a smile which seemed to confess, surreptitiously, and as if neither party could be eager, to recognition.

"Well, Mr. Bellamy says you'll do anything for *him*," Pandora said, smiling very sweetly at Mr. Lansing. "We haven't got much; we have been gone only two years."

Mr. Lansing scratched his head a little behind, with a movement which sent his straw hat forward in the direction of his nose. "I don't know as I would do anything for him that I shouldn't do for you," he responded, returning the smile of the girl. "I guess you'd better open that one," and he gave a little affectionate kick to one of the trunks.

"Oh, mother, isn't he lovely! It's only your sea-things," Pandora cried, stooping over the coffer instantly, with the key in her hand.

"I don't know that I like showing them," Mrs. Day murmured, modestly.

Vogelstein made his German salutation to the company in general, and to Pandora he offered an audible good-by, which she returned in a bright, friendly voice, but without looking round as she fumbled at the lock of her trunk.

"We'll try another, if you like," said Mr. Lansing, laughing.

"Oh, no, it's got to be this one! Good-by, Count Vogelstein. I hope you'll judge us correctly!"

The young man went his way and passed the barrier of the dock. Here he was met by his English servant, who had a face of consternation, which led him to ask whether a cab were not forthcoming.

"They call 'em 'acks 'ere, sir," said the man, "and they 're beyond everything. He wants thirty shillings to take you to the inn."

Vogelstein hesitated a moment. "Could n't you find a German?"

"By the way he talks, he *is* a German!" said the man; and in a moment Count Vogelstein began his career in America by discussing the tariff of hackney-coaches in the language of the fatherland.

## PART II.

VOGELSTEIN went wherever he was asked, on principle, partly to study American society, and partly because in Washington pastimes seemed to him not so numerous that one could afford to neglect occasions. Of course, at the end of two winters, he had a good many of various kinds, and his study of American society had yielded considerable fruit. When, however, in April, during the second year of his residence, he presented himself at a large party given by Mrs. Bonnycastle, and of which it was believed that it would be the last serious affair of the season, his being there (and still more his looking very fresh and talkative) was not the consequence of a rule of conduct. He went to Mrs. Bonnycastle's simply because he liked the lady, whose receptions were the pleasantest in Washington, and because if he did n't go there he did n't know what he should do; that absence of alternatives having become rather familiar to him in Washington. There were a great many things he did because if he did n't do them he did n't know what he should do. It must be added that in this case, even if there had been an alternative, he would still have decided to go to Mrs. Bonnycastle's. If her

house was not the pleasantest there, it was at least difficult to say which was pleasanter; and the complaint sometimes made of it that it was too limited, that it left out, on the whole, more people than it took in, applied with much less force when it was thrown open for a general party. Toward the end of the social year, in those soft, scented days of the Washington spring, when the air began to show a southern glow, and the little squares and circles (to which the wide, empty avenues converged according to a plan so ingenious, yet so bewildering) to flush with pink blossom and to make one wish to sit on benches, — at this period of expansion and condonation Mrs. Bonnycastle, who, during the winter, had been a good deal on the defensive, relaxed her vigilance a little, became humorously inconsistent, vernally reckless, as it were, and ceased to calculate the consequences of an hospitality which a reference to the back files — or even to the morning's issue — of the newspapers might easily show to be a mistake. But Washington life, to Vogelstein's apprehension, was paved with mistakes; he felt himself to be in a society which was founded on necessary errors. Little addicted as he was to the sportive view of existence, he had said to himself, at an early stage of his sojourn, that the only way to enjoy the United States would be to burn one's standards and warm one's self at the blaze. Such were the reflections of a theoretic Teuton, who now walked, for the most part, amid the ashes of his prejudices.

Mrs. Bonnycastle had endeavored more than once to explain to him the principles on which she received certain people and ignored certain others; but it was with difficulty that he entered into her discriminations. She perceived differences where he only saw resemblances, and both the merits and defects of a good many members of Washington society, as that society was interpreted to him by Mrs. Bonnycastle, he was often at a loss to understand. Fortunately she had a fund of good humor which, as I have intimated, was apt to come uppermost with the April blossoms, and which made the people she did not invite to her house almost as amusing to her as those she did. Her husband was not in politics, though politics were much in him; but the couple had taken upon themselves the responsibilities of an active patriotism; they thought it right to live in America, differing therein from many of their acquaintances, who only thought it pleasant. They had that burdensome heritage of foreign reminiscence with which so many Americans are saddled; but they carried it more easily than most of their country-people, and you knew they had lived in Europe only by their present exultation, never in the least by their regrets. Their regrets, that is, were only for their ever having lived there, as Mrs. Bonnycastle once told the wife of a foreign minister. They solved all their problems successfully, including those of knowing none of the people they did not wish to, and of finding plenty of occupation in a society supposed to be meagrely

provided with resources for persons of leisure. When, as the warm weather approached, they opened both the wings of their door, it was because they thought it would entertain them, and not because they were conscious of a pressure. Alfred Bonnycastle, all winter indeed, chafed a little at the definiteness of some of his wife's reserves; he thought that, for Washington, their society was really a little too good. Vogelstein still remembered the puzzled feeling (it had cleared up somewhat now) with which, more than a year before, he had heard Mr. Bonnycastle exclaim one evening, after a dinner in his own house, when every guest but the German secretary (who often sat late with the pair) had departed: "Hang it, there is only a month left; let us have some fun, — let us invite the President."

This was Mrs. Bonnycastle's carnival, and on the occasion to which I began my chapter by referring, the President had not only been invited, but had signified his intention of being present. I hasten to add that this was not the same functionary to whom Alfred Bonnycastle's irreverent allusion had been made. The White House had received a new tenant (the old one, then, was just leaving it), and Otto Vogelstein had had the advantage, during the first eighteen months of his stay in America, of seeing an electoral campaign, a presidential inauguration, and a distribution of spoils. He had been bewildered, during those first weeks, by finding that in the national capital, in the houses that he supposed to be the best,

the head of the State was not a coveted guest; for this could be the only explanation of Mr. Bonnycastle's whimsical proposal to invite him, as it were, in carnival. His successor went out a good deal, for a President.

The legislative session was over, but this made little difference in the aspect of Mrs. Bonnycastle's rooms, which, even at the height of the congressional season, could not be said to overflow with the representatives of the people. They were garnished with an occasional senator, whose movements and utterances often appeared to be regarded with a mixture of alarm and indulgence, as if they would be disappointing if they were not rather odd, and yet might be dangerous if they were not carefully watched. Vogelstein had grown to have a kindness for these conscript fathers of invisible families, who had something of the toga in the voluminous folds of their conversation, but were otherwise rather bare and bald, with stony wrinkles in their faces, like busts and statues of ancient law-givers. There seemed to him something chill and exposed in their being at once so exalted and so naked; there were lonesome glances in their eyes, sometimes, as if in the social world their legislative consciousness longed for the warmth of a few comfortable laws ready-made. Members of the House were very rare, and when Washington was new to Vogelstein he used sometimes to mistake them, in the halls and on the staircases where he met them, for the functionaries engaged for the evening to

usher in guests and wait at supper. It was only a little later that he perceived these latter functionaries were almost always impressive, and had a complexion which served as a livery. At present, however, such misleading figures were much less to be encountered than during the months of winter, and, indeed, they never were to be encountered at Mrs. Bonnycastle's. At present the social vistas of Washington, like the vast fresh flatness of the lettered and numbered streets, which at this season seemed to Vogelstein more spacious and vague than ever, suggested but a paucity of political phenomena. Count Otto, that evening, knew every one, or almost every one. There were very often inquiring strangers, expecting great things, from New York and Boston, and to them, in the friendly Washington way, the young German was promptly introduced. It was a society in which familiarity reigned, and in which people were liable to meet three times a day, so that their ultimate essence became a matter of importance.

"I have got three new girls," Mrs. Bonnycastle said. "You must talk to them all."

"All at once?" Vogelstein asked, reversing in imagination a position which was not unknown to him. He had often, in Washington, been discoursed to at the same moment by several virginal voices.

"Oh, no; you must have something different for each; you can't get off that way. Have n't you discovered that the American girl expects something especially adapted to herself? It 's very well for

Europe to have a few phrases that will do for any girl. The American girl is n't *any* girl; she 's a remarkable individual in a remarkable genus. But you must keep the best this evening for Miss Day."

"For Miss Day!" Vogelstein exclaimed, staring. "Do you mean Pandora?"

Mrs. Bonnycastle stared a moment in return, then laughed very hard. "One would think you had been looking for her over the globe! So you know her already, and you call her by her pet name?"

"Oh, no, I don't know her; that is, I have n't seen her, or thought of her, from that day to this. We came to America in the same ship."

"Is n't she an American, then?"

"Oh, yes; she lives at Utica, in the interior."

"In the interior of Utica? You can't mean my young woman, then, who lives in New York, where she is a great beauty and a great belle, and has been immensely admired this winter."

"After all," said Vogelstein, reflecting, and a little disappointed, "the name is not so uncommon; it is perhaps another. But has she rather strange eyes, a little yellow, but very pretty, and a nose a little arched?"

"I can't tell you all that; I have n't seen her. She is staying with Mrs. Steuben. She only came a day or two ago, and Mrs. Steuben is to bring her. When she wrote to me to ask leave she told me what I tell you. They have n't come yet."

Vogelstein felt a quick hope that the subject of

this correspondence might indeed be the young lady he had parted from on the dock at New York, but the indications seemed to point another way, and he had no wish to cherish an illusion. It did not seem to him probable that the energetic girl who had introduced him to Mr. Lansing would have the entrée of the best house in Washington; besides, Mrs. Bonnycastle's guest was described as a beauty and belonging to the brilliant city.

"What is the social position of Mrs. Steuben?" it occurred to him to ask in a moment, as he meditated. He had an earnest, artless, literal way of uttering such a question as that; you could see from it that he was very thorough.

Mrs. Bonnycastle broke into mocking laughter. "I'm sure I don't know! What's your own?" and she left him to turn to her other guests, to several of whom she repeated his question. Could they tell her what was the social position of Mrs. Steuben? There was Count Vogelstein, who wanted to know. He instantly became aware, of course, that he ought not to have made such an inquiry. Was not the lady's place in the scale sufficiently indicated by Mrs. Bonnycastle's acquaintance with her? Still, there were fine degrees, and he felt a little unduly snubbed. It was perfectly true, as he told his hostess, that with the quick wave of new impressions which had rolled over him after his arrival in America, the image of Pandora was almost completely effaced; he had seen a great many things which were quite as

remarkable in their way as the daughter of the Days, but at the touch of the idea that he might behold her again at any moment, she became as vivid in his mind as if they had parted but the day before; he remembered the exact shade of the eyes he had described to Mrs. Bonnycastle as yellow; the tone of her voice when, at the last, she expressed the hope that he would judge America correctly. Had he judged it correctly? If he were to meet her again, she doubtless would try to ascertain. It would be going much too far to say that the idea of such an ordeal was terrible to Otto Vogelstein; but it may at least be said that the thought of meeting Pandora Day made him nervous. The fact is certainly singular, but I shall not take upon myself to explain it; there are some things that even the most philosophic historian is not bound to account for.

He wandered into another room, and there, at the end of five minutes, he was introduced by Mrs. Bonnycastle to one of the young ladies of whom she had spoken. This was a very intelligent girl, who came from Boston and showed much acquaintance with Spielhagen's novels. "Do you like them?" Vogelstein asked, rather vaguely, not taking much interest in the matter, as he read works of fiction only in case of a sea-voyage. The young lady from Boston looked pensive and concentrated; then she answered that she liked *some* of them, but that there were others she did not like, and she enumerated the works that came under each of these heads. Spiel-

hagen is a voluminous writer, and such a catalogue took some time; at the end of it, moreover, Vogelstein's question was not answered, for he could not have told you whether she liked Spielhagen or not.

On the next topic, however, there was no doubt about her feelings. They talked about Washington as people talk only in the place itself, revolving about the subject in widening and narrowing circles, perching successively on its many branches, considering it from every point of view. Vogelstein had been long enough in America to discover that, after half a century of social neglect, Washington had become the fashion, and possessed the great advantage of being a new resource in conversation. This was especially the case in the months of spring, when the inhabitants of the commercial cities came so far southward to escape that boisterous interlude. They were all agreed that Washington was fascinating, and none of them were better prepared to talk it over than the Bostonians. Vogelstein originally had been rather out of step with them; he had not seized their point of view, had not known with what they compared this object of their infatuation. But now he knew everything; he had settled down to the pace; there was not a possible phase of the discussion which could find him at a loss. There was a kind of Hegelian element in it; in the light of these considerations the American capital took on the semblance of a monstrous, mystical *Werden*. But they fatigued Vogelstein a little, and it was his preference, as a

general thing, not to engage the same evening with more than one new-comer, one visitor in the freshness of initiation. This was why Mrs. Bonnycastle's expression of a wish to introduce him to three young ladies had startled him a little; he saw a certain process, in which he flattered himself that he had become proficient, but which was after all tolerably exhausting, repeated for each of the damsels. After separating from his judicious Bostonian, he rather evaded Mrs. Bonnycastle, contenting himself with the conversation of old friends, pitched, for the most part, in a lower and more sceptical key.

At last he heard it mentioned that the President had arrived, had been some half an hour in the house, and he went in search of the illustrious guest, whose whereabouts, at Washington parties, was not indicated by a cluster of courtiers. He made it a point, whenever he found himself in company with the President, to pay him his respects, and he had not been discouraged by the fact that there was no association of ideas in the eye of the great man as he put out his hand, presidentially, and said, "Happy to see you, sir." Vogelstein felt himself taken for a mere subject, possibly for an office-seeker; and he used to reflect at such moments that the monarchical form had its merits; it provided a line of heredity for the faculty of quick recognition. He had now some difficulty in finding the chief magistrate, and ended by learning that he was in the tea-room, a small apartment devoted to light refection, near the entrance of

the house. Here Vogelstein presently perceived him, seated on a sofa, in conversation with a lady. There were a number of people about the table, eating, drinking, talking; and the couple on the sofa, which was not near it, but against the wall, in a kind of recess, looked a little withdrawn, as if they had sought seclusion and were disposed to profit by the diverted attention of the others. The President leaned back; his gloved hands, resting on either knee, made large white spots. He looked eminent, but he looked relaxed, and the lady beside him was making him laugh. Vogelstein caught her voice as he approached. He heard her say, "Well, now, remember; I consider it a promise." She was very prettily dressed, in rose-color; her hands were clasped in her lap, and her eyes were attached to the presidential profile.

"Well, madam, in that case it's about the fiftieth promise I have given to-day."

It was just as he heard these words, uttered by her companion in reply, that Vogelstein checked himself, turned away, and pretended to be looking for a cup of tea. It was not customary to disturb the President, even simply to shake hands, when he was sitting on a sofa with a lady, and Vogelstein felt it in this case to be less possible than ever to break the rule, for the lady on the sofa was none other than Pandora Day. He had recognized her without her appearing to see him, and even in his momentary look he had perceived that she was now a person to be reckoned with. She had an air of elation, of success; she

looked brilliant in her rose-colored dress; she was extracting promises from the ruler of fifty millions of people. What an odd place to meet her, Vogelstein thought, and how little one could tell, after all, in America, who people were! He did n't wish to speak to her yet; he wished to wait a little, and learn more; but meanwhile there was something attractive in the thought that she was just behind him, a few yards off, that if he should turn he might see her again. It was she whom Mrs. Bonnycastle had meant, it was she who was so much admired in New York. Her face was the same, yet Vogelstein had seen in a moment that she was vaguely prettier; he had recognized the arch of her nose, which suggested ambition. He took some tea, which he did not want, in order not to go away. He remembered her *entourage* on the steamer; her father and mother, the silent burghers, so little "of the world," her infant sister, so much of it, her humorous brother with his tall hat and his influence in the smoking-room. He remembered Mrs. Dangerfield's warnings, — yet her perplexities, too, — and the letter from Mr. Bellamy, and the introduction to Mr. Lansing, and the way Pandora had stooped down on the dirty dock, laughing and talking, mistress of the situation, to open her trunk for the customs. He was pretty sure that she had paid no duties that day; that had been the purpose, of course, of Mr. Bellamy's letter. Was she still in correspondence with this gentleman, and had he got over his sickness? All this passed through Vogelstein's

mind, and he saw that it was quite in Pandora's line to be mistress of the situation, for there was nothing, evidently, on the present occasion, that could call itself her master. He drank his tea, and as he put down his cup he heard the President, behind him, say: "Well, I guess my wife will wonder why I don't come home."

"Why did n't you bring her with you?" Pandora asked.

"Well, she does n't go out much. Then she has got her sister staying with her, — Mrs. Runkle, from Natchez. She 's a good deal of an invalid, and my wife does n't like to leave her."

"She must be a very kind woman," Pandora remarked, sympathetically.

"Well, I guess she is n't spoiled — yet."

"I should like very much to come and see her," said Pandora.

"Do come round. Could n't you come some night?" the President responded.

"Well, I 'll come some time. And I shall remind you of your promise."

"All right. There 's nothing like keeping it up. Well," said the President, "I must bid good-by to these folks."

Vogelstein heard him rise from the sofa, with his companion, and he gave the pair time to pass out of the room before him, which they did with a certain impressive deliberation, people making way for the ruler of fifty millions, and looking with a certain

curiosity at the striking pink person at his side. When, after a few moments, Vogelstein followed them across the hall, into one of the other rooms, he saw the host and hostess accompany the President to the door, and two foreign ministers and a judge of the Supreme Court address themselves to Pandora Day. He resisted the impulse to join this circle; if he spoke to her at all, he wished to speak to her alone. She continued, nevertheless, to occupy him, and when Mrs. Bonnycastle came back from the hall he immediately approached her with an appeal. "I wish you would tell me something more about that girl, — that one, opposite, in pink?"

"The lovely Day, — that is what they call her, I believe? I wanted you to talk with her."

"I find she *is* the one I have met. But she seems to be so different here. I can't make it out."

There was something in his expression which provoked Mrs. Bonnycastle to mirth. "How we do puzzle you Europeans! You look quite bewildered."

"I am sorry I look so, — I try to hide it. But, of course, we are very simple. Let me ask, then, a simple question. Are her parents also in society?"

"Parents in society? *D'où tombez-vous?* Did you ever hear of a girl — in rose-color — whose parents were in society?"

"Is she, then, all alone?" Count Vogelstein inquired, with a strain of melancholy in his voice.

Mrs. Bonnycastle stared at him a moment, with her laughter in her face. "You are too pathetic.

Don't you know what she is? I supposed, of course, you knew."

"It 's exactly what I am asking you."

"Why, she 's the new type. It has only come up lately. They have had articles about it in the papers. That 's the reason I told Mrs. Steuben to bring her."

"The new type? What new type, Mrs. Bonnycastle?" said Vogelstein, pleadingly, and conscious that all types in America were new.

Her laughter checked her reply for a moment, and by the time she had recovered herself the young lady from Boston, with whom Vogelstein had been talking, stood there to take leave. This, for an American type, was an old one, he was sure; and the process of parting, between the guest and her hostess, had an ancient elaboration. Vogelstein waited a little; then he turned away and walked up to Pandora Day, whose group of interlocutors had now been reinforced by a gentleman that had held an important place in the cabinet of the late occupant of the presidential chair. Vogelstein had asked Mrs. Bonnycastle if she were "all alone;" but there was nothing in Pandora's present situation that suggested isolation. She was not sufficiently alone for Vogelstein's taste; but he was impatient, and he hoped she would give him a few words to himself. She recognized him without a moment's hesitation, and with the sweetest smile, a smile that matched the tone in which she said: "I was watching you; I wondered whether you were not going to speak to me."

"Miss Day was watching him!" one of the foreign ministers exclaimed, "and we flattered ourselves that her attention was all with us."

"I mean before," said the girl, "while I was talking with the President."

At this the gentlemen began to laugh, and one of them remarked that this was the way the absent were sacrificed, even the great; while another said that he hoped Vogelstein was duly flattered.

"Oh, I was watching the President too," said Pandora. "I have got to watch *him*. He has promised me something."

"It must be the mission to England," the judge of the Supreme Court suggested. "A good position for a lady; they 've got a lady at the head over there."

"I wish they would send you to *my* country," one of the foreign ministers suggested. "I would immediately get recalled."

"Why, perhaps in your country I would n't speak to you. It 's only because you 're here," the girl returned with a gay familiarity which, with her, was evidently but one of the arts of defence. "You 'll see what mission it is when it comes out. But I will speak to Count Vogelstein anywhere," she went on. "He is an older friend than any one here. I have known him in difficult days."

"Oh, yes, on the ocean," said the young man, smiling. "On the watery waste, in the tempest!"

"Oh, I don't mean that so much; we had a beautiful voyage, and there was n't any tempest. I mean

when I was living in Utica. That's a watery waste, if you like, and a tempest there would have been a pleasant variety."

"Your parents seemed to me so peaceful!" Vogelstein exclaimed, with a vague wish to say something sympathetic.

"Oh, you have n't seen them on shore! At Utica they were very lively. But that is no longer our home. Don't you remember I told you I was working for New York? Well, I worked, — I had to work hard. But we have moved."

"And I hope they are happy," said Vogelstein.

"My father and mother? Oh, they will be, in time. I must give them time. They are very young yet; they have years before them. And you have been always in Washington?" Pandora continued. "I suppose you have found out everything about everything."

"Oh, no; there are some things I can't find out."

"Come and see me, and perhaps I can help you. I am very different from what I was on the ship. I have advanced a great deal since then."

"Oh, how was Miss Day on the ship?" asked the cabinet minister of the last administration.

"She was delightful, of course," said Vogelstein.

"He is very flattering; I did n't open my mouth!" Pandora cried. "Here comes Mrs. Steuben, to take me to some other place. I believe it 's a literary party, near the Capitol. Everything seems so separate, in Washington. Mrs. Steuben is going to read

a poem. I wish she would read it here; would n't it do as well?"

This lady, arriving, signified to Pandora the necessity of their moving on. But Miss Day's companions had various things to say to her before giving her up. She had an answer for each of them, and it was brought home to Vogelstein, as he listened, that, as she said, she had advanced a great deal. Daughter of small burghers, as she was, she was really brilliant. Vogelstein turned away a little, and, while Mrs. Steuben waited, asked her a question. He had made her, half an hour before, the subject of that inquiry to which Mrs. Bonnycastle returned so ambiguous an answer; but this was not because he had not some direct acquaintance with Mrs. Steuben, as well as a general idea of the esteem in which she was held. He had met her in various places, and he had been at her house. She was the widow of a commodore, a handsome, mild, soft, swaying woman, whom every one liked, with glossy bands of black hair, and a little ringlet depending behind each ear. Some one had said that she looked like the queen in "Hamlet." She had written verses which were admired in the South, wore a full-length portrait of the commodore on her bosom, and spoke with the accent of Savannah. She had about her a positive odor of Washington. It had certainly been very superfluous in Vogelstein to question Mrs. Bonnycastle about her social position.

"Do kindly tell me," he said, lowering his voice,

"what is the type to which that young lady belongs? Mrs. Bonnycastle tells me it 's a new one."

Mrs. Steuben for a moment fixed her liquid eyes upon the secretary of legation. She always seemed to be translating the prose of your speech into the finer rhythms with which her own mind was familiar. "Do you think anything is really new?" she asked. "I am very fond of the old; you know that is a weakness of we Southerners." The poor lady, it will be observed, had another weakness as well. "What we often take to be the new, is simply the old under some novel form. Were there not remarkable natures in the past? If you doubt it, you should visit the South, where the past still lingers."

Vogelstein had been struck before this with Mrs. Steuben's pronunciation of the word by which her native latitudes were designated; transcribing it from her lips, you would have written it (as the nearest approach) the Sooth. But, at present, he scarcely observed this peculiarity; he was wondering, rather, how a woman could be at once so copious and so unsatisfactory. What did he care about the past, or even about the Sooth? He was afraid of starting her again. He looked at her, discouraged and helpless, as bewildered almost as Mrs. Bonnycastle had found him half an hour before; looked also at the commodore, who, on her bosom, seemed to breathe again with his widow's respirations. "Call it an old type, then, if you like," he said in a moment. "All I want to know is what type it is! It seems impossible to find out."

"You can find out in the newspapers. They have had articles about it. They write about everything now. But it is n't true about Miss Day. It is one of the first families. Her great-grandfather was in the Revolution." Pandora by this time had given her attention again to Mrs. Steuben. She seemed to signify that she was ready to move on. "Was n't your great-grandfather in the Revolution?" Mrs. Steuben asked. "I am telling Count Vogelstein about him."

"Why are you asking about my ancestors?" the girl demanded, smiling, of the young German. "Is that the thing that you said just now that you can't find out? Well, if Mrs. Steuben will only be quiet you never will."

Mrs. Steuben shook her head rather dreamily. "Well, it 's no trouble for a Southerner to be quiet. There 's a kind of languor in our blood. Besides, we have to be, to-day. But I have got to show some energy to-night. I have got to get you to the end of Pennsylvania Avenue."

Pandora gave her hand to Count Vogelstein and asked him if he thought they should meet again. He answered that in Washington people were always meeting, and that at any rate he should not fail to come and see her. Hereupon, just as the two ladies were detaching themselves, Mrs. Steuben remarked that if Count Vogelstein and Miss Day wished to meet again, the picnic would be a good chance, — the picnic that she was getting up for the following

Thursday. It was to consist of about twenty bright people, and they would go down the Potomac to Mount Vernon. Vogelstein answered that, if Mrs. Steuben thought him bright enough, he should be delighted to join the party; and he was told the hour for which the tryst was taken.

He remained at Mrs. Bonnycastle's after every one had gone, and then he informed this lady of his reason for waiting. Would she have mercy on him and let him know, in a single word, before he went to rest — for without it rest would be impossible — what was this famous type to which Pandora Day belonged?

"Gracious, you don't mean to say you have not found out that type yet!" Mrs. Bonnycastle exclaimed, with a return of her hilarity. "What have you been doing all the evening? You Germans may be thorough, but you certainly are not quick!"

It was Alfred Bonnycastle who at last took pity on him. "My dear Vogelstein, she is the latest, freshest fruit of our great American evolution. She is the self-made girl!"

Vogelstein gazed a moment. "The fruit of the great American Revolution? Yes, Mrs. Steuben told me her great-grandfather —" but the rest of his sentence was lost in the explosion of Mrs. Bonnycastle's mirth. He bravely continued his interrogation, however, and, desiring his host's definition to be defined, inquired what the self-made girl might be.

"Sit down, and we'll tell you all about it," Mrs.

Bonnycastle said. "I like talking, this way, after a party's over. You can smoke, if you like, and Alfred will open a window. Well, to begin with, the self-made girl is a new feature. That, however, you know. In the second place, she isn't self-made at all. We all help to make her; we take such an interest in her."

"That's only after she is made!" Alfred Bonnycastle broke in. "But it's Vogelstein that takes an interest. What on earth has started you up so on the subject of Miss Day?"

Vogelstein explained, as well as he could, that it was merely the accident of his having crossed the ocean in the steamer with her; but he felt the inadequacy of this account of the matter, felt it more than his hosts, who could know neither how little actual contact he had had with her on the ship, how much he had been affected by Mrs. Dangerfield's warnings, nor how much observation at the same time he had lavished on her. He sat there half an hour, and the warm, dead stillness of the Washington night — nowhere are the nights so silent — came in at the open window, mingled with a soft, sweet, earthy smell, — the smell of growing things. Before he went away he had heard all about the self-made girl, and there was something in the picture that almost inspired him. She was possible, doubtless, only in America; American life had smoothed the way for her. She was not fast, nor emancipated, nor crude, nor loud, and there was not in her, of necessity, at least, a grain

of the stuff of which the adventuress is made. She was simply very successful, and her success was entirely personal. She had not been born with the silver spoon of social opportunity; she had grasped it by honest exertion. You knew her by many different signs, but chiefly, infallibly, by the appearance of her parents. It was her parents that told the story; you always saw that her parents could never have made her. Her attitude with regard to them might vary in different ways. The great fact on her own side being that she had lifted herself from a lower social plane, done it all herself, and done it by the simple lever of her personality, — in this view, of course, it was to be expected that she should leave the authors of her being in the shade. Sometimes she had them in her wake, lost in the bubbles and the foam that showed where she had passed; sometimes, as Alfred Bonnycastle said, she let them slide; sometimes she kept them in close confinement; sometimes she exhibited them to the public in discreet glimpses, in prearranged attitudes. But the general characteristic of the self-made girl was that, though it was frequently understood that she was privately devoted to her kindred, she never attempted to impose them on society, and it was striking that she was much better than they. They were almost always solemn and portentous, and they were for the most part of a deathly respectability. She was not necessarily snobbish, unless it was snobbish to want the best. She did n't cringe, she did n't make herself

smaller than she was; on the contrary, she took a stand of her own and attracted things to herself. Naturally, she was possible only in America, — only in a country where certain competitions were absent. The natural history of this interesting creature was at last completely exhibited to Vogelstein, who, as he sat there in the animated stillness, with the fragrant breath of the western world in his nostrils, was convinced of what he had already suspected, that conversation in the United States is much more psychological than elsewhere. Another thing, as he learned, that you knew the self-made girl by, was her culture, which was perhaps a little too obvious. She had usually got into society more or less by reading, and her conversation was apt to be garnished with literary allusions, even with familiar quotations. Vogelstein had not had time to observe this element in a developed form in Pandora Day; but Alfred Bonnycastle said that he would n't trust her to keep it under in a *tête-à-tête*. It was needless to say that these young persons had always been to Europe; that was usually the first thing they did. By this means they sometimes got into society in foreign lands before they did so at home; it was to be added, on the other hand, that this resource was less and less valuable, for Europe, in the United States, had less and less prestige, and people in the latter country now kept a watch on that roundabout road. All this applied perfectly to Pandora Day, — the journey to Europe, the culture (as exemplified in the books

she read on the ship), the effacement of the family. The only thing that was exceptional was the rapidity with which she had advanced; for the jump she had taken since he left her in the hands of Mr. Lansing struck Vogelstein, even after he had made all allowance for the abnormal homogeneity of American society, as really considerable. It took all her cleverness to account for it. When she moved her family from Utica, the battle appeared virtually to have been gained.

Vogelstein called on her the next day, and Mrs. Steuben's blackamoor informed him, in the communicative manner of his race, that the ladies had gone out to pay some visits and look at the Capitol. Pandora apparently had not hitherto examined this monument, and the young man wished he had known, the evening before, of her omission, so that he might have offered to be her initiator. There is too obvious a connection for me to attempt to conceal it, between his regret and the fact that in leaving Mrs. Steuben's door he reminded himself that he wanted a good walk, and took his way along Pennsylvania Avenue. His walk had become fairly good by the time he reached the great white edifice which unfolds its repeated colonnades and uplifts its isolated dome at the end of a long vista of saloons and tobacco-shops. He slowly climbed the great steps, hesitating a little, and wondering why he had come there. The superficial reason was obvious enough, but there was a real one behind it which seemed to Vogelstein rather

wanting in the solidity which should characterize the motives of an emissary of Prince Bismarck. The superficial reason was a belief that Mrs. Steuben would pay her visit first, — it was probably only a question of leaving cards, — and bring her young friend to the Capitol at the hour when the yellow afternoon light would give a tone to the blankness of its marble walls. The Capitol was a splendid building, but it was rather wanting in tone. Vogelstein's curiosity about Pandora Day had been much more quickened than checked by the revelations made to him in Mrs. Bonnycastle's drawing-room. It was a relief to see the young lady classified; but he had a desire, of which he had not been conscious before, to see really to the end how well a girl could make herself. His calculations had been just, and he had wandered about the rotunda for only ten minutes, looking again at the paintings, commemorative of national history, which occupy its panels, and at the simulated sculptures, so touchingly characteristic of early American taste, which adorn its upper reaches, when the charming women he had hoped for presented themselves in charge of a licensed guide. He went to meet them, and did not conceal from them that he had marked them for his own. The encounter was happy on both sides, and he accompanied them through the queer and endless interior, through labyrinths of white, bare passages, into legislative and judicial halls. He thought it a hideous place; he had seen it all before, and he asked himself what he was doing *dans cette*

*galère.* In the lower house there were certain bedaubed walls, in the basest style of imitation, which made him feel faintly sick; there was a lobby adorned with artless prints and photographs of eminent congressmen, which was too serious for a joke and too comical for anything else. But Pandora was greatly interested; she thought the Capitol very fine; it was easy to criticise the details, but as a whole it was the most impressive building she had ever seen. She was very good company; she had constantly something to say, but she never insisted too much; it was impossible to be less heavy, to drag less, in the business of walking behind a cicerone. Vogelstein could see, too, that she wished to improve her mind; she looked at the historical pictures, at the uncanny statues of local worthies, presented by the different States, — they were of different sizes, as if they had been "numbered," in a shop, — she asked questions of the conductor, and in the chamber of the Senate requested him to show her the chairs of the gentlemen from New York. She sat down in one of them, though Mrs. Steuben told her *that* senator (she mistook the chair, dropping into another State) was a horrid old thing.

Throughout the hour that he spent with her, Vogelstein seemed to see how it was that she had made herself. They walked about afterwards on the magnificent terrace that surrounds the Capitol, the great marble table on which it stands, and made vague remarks (Pandora's were the most definite) about the yellow

sheen of the Potomac, the hazy hills of Virginia, the far gleaming pediment of Arlington, the raw, confused-looking country. Washington was beneath them, bristling and geometrical; the long lines of its avenues seemed to stretch into national futures. Pandora asked Vogelstein if he had ever been to Athens, and, on his replying in the affirmative, inquired whether the eminence on which they stood did not give him an idea of the Acropolis in its prime. Vogelstein deferred the answer to this question to their next meeting; he was glad (in spite of the question) to make pretexts for seeing her again. He did so on the morrow; Mrs. Steuben's picnic was still three days distant. He called on Pandora a second time, and he met her every evening in the Washington world. It took very little of this to remind him that he was forgetting both Mrs. Dangerfield's warnings and the admonitions — long familiar to him — of his own conscience. Was he in peril of love? Was he to be sacrificed on the altar of the American girl, an altar at which those other poor fellows had poured out some of the bluest blood in Germany and he had declared, himself, that he would never seriously worship? He decided that he was not in real danger, — that he had taken his precautions too well. It was true that a young person who had succeeded so well for herself might be a great help to her husband; but Vogelstein on the whole preferred that his success should be his own; it would not be agreeable to him to have the air of being pushed by

his wife. Such a wife as that would wish to push him, and he could hardly admit to himself that this was what fate had in reserve for him, — to be propelled, in his career, by a young lady who would perhaps attempt to talk to the Kaiser as he had heard her the other night talk to the President. Would she consent to terminate relations with her family, or would she wish still to borrow plastic relief from that domestic background? That her family was so impossible was to a certain extent an advantage; for, if they had been a little better, the question of a rupture would be less easy. Vogelstein turned over these questions in spite of his security, or, perhaps, indeed, because of it. The security made them speculative and disinterested.

They haunted him during the excursion to Mount Vernon, which took place according to traditions long established. Mrs. Steuben's confederates assembled on the steamer, and were set afloat on the big brown stream which had already seemed to Vogelstein to have too much bosom and too little bank. Here and there, however, he became conscious of a shore where there was something to look at, even though he was conscious at the same time that he had of old lost great opportunities of idyllic talk in not sitting beside Pandora Day on the deck of the North German Lloyd. The two turned round together to contemplate Alexandria, which for Pandora, as she declared, was a picture of Old Virginia. She told Vogelstein that she was always hearing about it during the Civil

War, years before. Little girl as she had been at the time, she remembered all the names that were on people's lips during those years of reiteration. This historic spot had a certain picturesqueness of decay, a reference to older things, to a dramatic past. The past of Alexandria appeared in the vista of three or four short streets, sloping up a hill and bordered with old brick warehouses, erected for merchandise that had ceased to come or go. It looked hot and blank and sleepy, down to the shabby waterside, where tattered darkies dangled their bare feet from the edge of rotting wharves. Pandora was even more interested in Mount Vernon (when at last its wooded bluff began to command the river) than she had been in the Capitol, and after they had disembarked and ascended to the celebrated mansion she insisted on going into every room it contained. She declared that it had the finest situation in the world, and that it was a shame they did n't give it to the President for his country-seat. Most of her companions had seen the house often, and were now coupling themselves in the grounds, according to their sympathies, so that it was easy for Vogelstein to offer the benefit of his own experience to the most inquisitive member of the party. They were not to lunch for another hour, and in the interval Vogelstein wandered about with Pandora. The breath of the Potomac, on the boat, had been a little harsh, but on the softly curving lawn, beneath the clustered trees, with the river relegated to a mere shining presence far

below and in the distance, the day gave out nothing but its mildness, the whole scene became noble and genial.

Vogelstein could joke a little on great occasions, and the present one was worthy of his humor. He maintained to his companion that the shallow, painted mansion looked like a false house, a "fly," a structure of daubed canvas on the stage; but she answered him so well with certain economical palaces she had seen in Germany, where, as she said, there was nothing but china stoves and stuffed birds, that he was obliged to admit the home of Washington was after all really *gemüthlich*. What he found so, in fact, was the soft texture of the day, his personal situation, the sweetness of his suspense. For suspense had decidedly become his portion; he was under a charm which made him feel that he was watching his own life, and that his susceptibilities were beyond his control. It hung over him that things might take a turn, from one hour to the other, which would make them very different from what they had been yet; and his heart certainly beat a little faster as he wondered what that turn might be. Why did he come to picnics on fragrant April days with American girls who might lead him too far? Would not such girls be glad to marry a Pomeranian count? And *would* they, after all, talk that way to the Kaiser? If he were to marry one of them he should have to give her some lessons. In their little tour of the house, Vogelstein and his companion had had a great many fellow-visitors, who had

also arrived by the steamer, and who had hitherto not left them an ideal privacy. But the others gradually dispersed; they circled about a kind of showman, who was the authorized guide, a big, slow, genial, familiar man, with a large beard and a whimsical, edifying, patronizing tone, which had immense success when he stopped here and there to make his points, — to pass his eyes over his listening flock, then fix them quite above it with a meditative look, and bring out some ancient pleasantry as if it were a sudden inspiration. He made a cheerful thing even of a visit to the tomb of the *pater patriæ*. It is enshrined in a kind of grotto in the grounds, and Vogelstein remarked to Pandora that he was a good man for the place, but that he was too familiar. "Oh, he would have been familiar with Washington," said the girl, with the bright dryness with which she often uttered amusing things. Vogelstein looked at her a moment, and it came over him, as he smiled, that she herself probably would not have been abashed even by the hero with whom history has taken fewest liberties. "You look as if you could hardly believe that," Pandora went on. "You Germans are always in such awe of great people." And it occurred to Vogelstein that perhaps, after all, Washington would have liked her manner, which was wonderfully fresh and natural. The man with the beard was an ideal cicerone for American shrines; he played upon the curiosity of his little band with the touch of a master, and drew them away to see the classic ice-house where

the old lady had been found weeping in the belief that it was Washington's grave. While this monument was under inspection Vogelstein and Pandora had the house to themselves, and they spent some time on a pretty terrace, upon which certain windows of the second floor opened, — a little roofless veranda, which overhung, in a manner, obliquely, all the magnificence of the view, — the immense sweep of the river, the artistic plantations, the last-century garden, with its big box hedges and remains of old espaliers. They lingered here for nearly half an hour, and it was in this spot that Vogelstein enjoyed the only approach to intimate conversation that fate had in store for him with a young woman in whom he had been unable to persuade himself that he was not interested. It is not necessary, and it is not possible, that I should reproduce this colloquy; but I may mention that it began — as they leaned against the parapet of the terrace and heard the cheerful voice of the showman wafted up to them from a distance — with his saying to her, rather abruptly, that he could n't make out why they had n't had more talk together when they crossed the ocean.

"Well, I can, if you can't," said Pandora. "I would have talked, if you had spoken to me. I spoke to you first."

"Yes, I remember that," Vogelstein replied, rather awkwardly.

"You listened too much to Mrs. Dangerfield."

"To Mrs. Dangerfield?"

"That woman you were always sitting with; she told you not to speak to me. I have seen her in New York; she speaks to me now herself. She recommended you to have nothing to do with me."

"Oh, how can you say such dreadful things?" the young man murmured, blushing very red.

"You know you can't deny it. You were not attracted by my family. They are charming people when you know them. I don't have a better time anywhere than I have at home," the girl went on, loyally. "But what does it matter? My family are very happy. They are getting quite used to New York. Mrs. Dangerfield is a vulgar wretch; next winter she will call on me."

"You are unlike any girl I have ever seen; I don't understand you," said poor Vogelstein, with the color still in his face.

"Well, you never will understand me — probably; but what difference does it make?'

Vogelstein attempted to tell her what difference it made, but I have not space to follow him here. It is known that when the German mind attempts to explain things it does not always reduce them to simplicity, and Pandora was first mystified, then amused, by some of her companion's revelations. At last I think she was a little frightened, for she remarked, irrelevantly, with some decision, that luncheon would be ready and they ought to join Mrs. Steuben. He walked slowly, on purpose, as they left the house

together, for he had a vague feeling that he was losing her.

"And shall you be in Washington many days yet?" he asked her, as they went.

"It will all depend. I am expecting some news. What I shall do will be influenced by that."

The way she talked about expecting news made him feel, somehow, that she had a career, — that she was active and independent, so that he could scarcely hope to stop her as she passed. It was certainly true that he had never seen any girl like her. It would have occurred to him that the news she was expecting might have reference to the favor she had begged of the President, if he had not already made up his mind — in the calm of meditation after that talk with the Bonnycastles — that this favor must be a pleasantry. What she had said to him had a discouraging, a somewhat chilling, effect; nevertheless it was not without a certain ardor that he inquired of her whether, so long as she stayed in Washington, he might not come and see her.

"You may come as often as you like," she answered; "but you won't care for it long."

"You try to torment me," said Vogelstein.

She hesitated a moment. "I mean that I may have some of my family."

"I shall be delighted to see them again."

She hesitated again. "There are some you have never seen."

In the afternoon, returning to Washington on the

steamer, Count Vogelstein received a warning. It came from Mrs. Bonnycastle, and constituted, oddly enough, the second occasion on which an officious female friend had, on the deck of a vessel, advised him on the subject of Pandora Day.

"There is one thing we forgot to tell you the other night about the self-made girl," Mrs. Bonnycastle said. "It is never safe to fix your affections upon her, because she has almost always got an impediment somewhere in the background."

Vogelstein looked at her askance, but he smiled and said, "I should understand your information — for which I am so much obliged — a little better if I knew what you mean by an impediment."

"Oh, I mean she 's always engaged to some young man who belongs to her earlier phase."

"Her earlier phase?"

"The time before she had made herself,—when she lived at home. A young man from Utica, say. They usually have to wait; he is probably in a store. It 's a long engagement."

"Do you mean a betrothal, — to be married?"

"I don't mean anything German and transcendental. I mean that peculiarly American institution, a precocious engagement; to be married, of course."

Vogelstein very properly reflected that it was no use his having entered the diplomatic career if he were not able to bear himself as if this interesting generalization had no particular message for him. He did Mrs. Bonnycastle, moreover, the justice to

believe that she would not have taken up the subject so casually if she had suspected that she should make him wince. The whole thing was one of her jokes, and the notification, moreover, was really friendly. "I see, I see," he said in a moment. "The self-made girl has, of course, always had a past. Yes, and the young man in the store — from Utica — is part of her past."

"You express it perfectly," said Mrs. Bonnycastle. "I could n't say it better myself."

"But, with her present — with her future, I suppose it's all over. How do you say it in America? She lets him slide."

"We don't say it at all!" Mrs. Bonnycastle cried. "She does nothing of the sort; for what do you take her? She sticks to him; that, at least, is what we expect her to do," Mrs. Bonnycastle added, more thoughtfully. "As I tell you, the type is new. We have n't yet had time for complete observations."

"Oh, of course, I hope she sticks to him," Vogelstein declared, simply, and with his German accent more apparent, as it always was when he was slightly agitated.

For the rest of the trip he was rather restless. He wandered about the boat, talking little with the returning picnickers. Toward the last, as they drew near Washington, and the white dome of the Capitol hung aloft before them, looking as simple as a suspended snowball, he found himself, on the deck, in proximity to Mrs. Steuben. He reproached himself

with having rather neglected her during an entertainment for which he was indebted to her bounty, and he sought to repair his omission by a little friendly talk. But the only thing he could think of to say to her was to ask her by chance whether Miss Day were, to her knowledge, engaged.

Mrs. Steuben turned her Southern eyes upon him with a look of almost romantic compassion. "To my knowledge? Why, of course I'd know! I should think you'd know, too. Didn't you know she was engaged? Why, she's been engaged since she was sixteen."

Vogelstein stared at the dome of the Capitol. "To a gentleman from Utica?"

"Yes, a native of her place. She is expecting him soon."

"Oh, I'm so glad to hear it," said Vogelstein, who, decidedly, for his career, had promise. "And is she going to marry him?"

"Why, what do people get engaged for? I presume they will marry before long."

"But why have they never done so in so many years?"

"Well, at first she was too young, and then she thought her family ought to see Europe, — of course they could see it better with her, — and they spent some time there. And then Mr. Bellamy had some business difficulties which made him feel as if he didn't want to marry just then. But he has given up business, and I presume he feels more free. Of

course it 's rather long, but all the while they have been engaged. It 's a true, true love," said Mrs. Steuben, who had a little flute-like way of sounding the adjective.

"Is his name Mr. Bellamy?" Vogelstein asked, with his haunting reminiscence. "D. F. Bellamy, eh? And has he been in a store?"

"I don't know what kind of business it was: it was some kind of business, in Utica. I think he had a branch in New York. He is one of the leading gentlemen of Utica, and very highly educated. He 's a good deal older than Miss Day. He 's a very fine man. He stands very high in Utica. I don't know why you look as if you doubted it."

Vogelstein assured Mrs. Steuben that he doubted nothing, and indeed what she told him struck him as all the more credible as it seemed to him eminently strange. Bellamy had been the name of the gentleman who, a year and a half before, was to have met Pandora on the arrival of the German steamer; it was in Bellamy's name that she had addressed herself with such effusion to Bellamy's friend, the man in the straw hat, who was about to fumble in her mother's old clothes. This was a fact which seemed to Vogelstein to finish the picture of her contradictions; it wanted at present no touch to be complete. Yet, even as it hung there before him, it continued to fascinate him, and he stared at it, detached from surrounding things, and feeling a little as if he had been pitched out of an overturned vehicle, till the boat

bumped against one of the outstanding piles of the wharf at which Mrs. Steuben's party was to disembark. There was some delay in getting the steamer adjusted to the dock, during which the passengers stood watching the process over its side, and extracting what entertainment they might from the appearance of the various persons collected to receive it. There were darkies, and loafers, and hackmen, and also individuals with tufts on their chins, toothpicks in their mouths, their hands in their pockets, rumination in their jaws, and diamond pins in their shirt-fronts, who looked as if they had sauntered over from Pennsylvania Avenue to while away half an hour, forsaking for that interval their various slanting postures in the porticos of the hotels and the doorways of the saloons.

"Oh, I am so glad! How good of you to come down!" It was a voice close to Vogelstein's shoulder that spoke these words, and the young secretary of legation had no need to turn to see from whom it proceeded. It had been in his ears the greater part of the day, though, as he now perceived, without the fullest richness of expression of which it was capable. Still less was he obliged to turn to discover to whom it was addressed, for the few simple words that I have quoted had been flung across the narrowing interval of water, and a gentleman who had stepped to the edge of the dock without Vogelstein's observing him tossed back an immediate reply.

"I got here by the three o'clock train. They told

me in K Street where you were, and I thought I would come down and meet you."

"Charming attention!" said Pandora Day, with her friendly laugh; and for some moments she and her interlocutor appeared to continue the conversation only with their eyes. Meanwhile Vogelstein's, also, were not idle. He looked at Pandora's visitor from head to foot, and he was aware that she was quite unconscious of his own proximity. The gentleman before him was tall, good-looking, well-dressed; evidently he would stand well not only at Utica, but, judging from the way he had planted himself on the dock, in any position which circumstances might compel him to take up. He was about forty years old; he had a black mustache and a business-like eye. He waved a gloved hand at Pandora, as if, when she exclaimed, "Gracious, ain't they long!" to urge her to be patient. She was patient for a minute, and then she asked him if he had any news. He looked at her briefly, in silence, smiling, after which he drew from his pocket a large letter, with an official-looking seal, and shook it jocosely above his head. This was discreetly, covertly done. No one appeared to observe the little interview but Vogelstein. The boat was now touching the wharf, and the space between the pair was inconsiderable.

"Department of State?" Pandora asked, dropping her voice.

"That's what they call it."

"Well, what country?"

"What's your opinion of the Dutch?" the gentleman asked, for an answer.

"Oh, gracious!" cried Pandora.

"Well, are you going to wait for the return trip?" said the gentleman.

Vogelstein turned away, and presently Mrs. Steuben and her companions disembarked together. When this lady entered a carriage with Pandora the gentleman who had spoken to the girl followed them; the others scattered, and Vogelstein, declining with thanks a "lift" from Mrs. Bonnycastle, walked home alone, in some intensity of meditation. Two days later he saw in a newspaper an announcement that the President had offered the post of Minister to Holland to Mr. D. F. Bellamy, of Utica; and in the course of a month he heard from Mrs. Steuben that Pandora's long engagement had terminated at the nuptial altar. He communicated this news to Mrs. Bonnycastle, who had not heard it, with the remark that there was now ground for a new induction as to the self-made girl.

# GEORGINA'S REASONS.

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## PART I.

### I.

SHE was certainly a singular girl, and if he felt at the end that he did n't know her nor understand her, it is not surprising that he should have felt it at the beginning. But he felt at the beginning what he did not feel at the end, that her singularity took the form of a charm which — once circumstances had made them so intimate — it was impossible to resist or conjure away. He had a strange impression (it amounted at times to a positive distress, and shot through the sense of pleasure — morally speaking — with the acuteness of a sudden twinge of neuralgia) that it would be better for each of them that they should break off short and never see each other again. In later years he called this feeling a foreboding, and remembered two or three occasions when he had been on the point of expressing it to Georgina. Of course, in fact, he never expressed it; there were plenty of good reasons for that. Happy love is not disposed to assume disagreeable duties, and Raymond Benyon's

love was happy, in spite of grave presentiments, in spite of the singularity of his mistress and the insufferable rudeness of her parents. She was a tall, fair girl, with a beautiful cold eye and a smile of which the perfect sweetness, proceeding from the lips, was full of compensation; she had auburn hair of a hue that could be qualified as nothing less than gorgeous, and she seemed to move through life with a stately grace, as she would have walked through an old-fashioned minuet. Gentlemen connected with the navy have the advantage of seeing many types of women; they are able to compare the ladies of New York with those of Valparaiso, and those of Halifax with those of the Cape of Good Hope. Raymond Benyon had had these advantages, and being very fond of women he had learnt his lesson; he was in a position to appreciate Georgina Gressie's fine points. She looked like a duchess, — I don't mean that in foreign ports Benyon had associated with duchesses, — and she took everything so seriously. That was flattering for the young man, who was only a lieutenant, detailed for duty at the Brooklyn navy-yard, without a penny in the world but his pay, with a set of plain, numerous, seafaring, God-fearing relations in New Hampshire, a considerable appearance of talent, a feverish, disguised ambition, and a slight impediment in his speech.

He was a spare, tough young man, his dark hair was straight and fine, and his face, a trifle pale, was smooth and carefully drawn. He stammered a

little, blushing when he did so, at long intervals. I scarcely know how he appeared on shipboard, but on shore, in his civilian's garb, which was of the neatest, he had as little as possible an aroma of winds and waves. He was neither salt nor brown, nor red, nor particularly "hearty." He never twitched up his trousers, nor, so far as one could see, did he, with his modest, attentive manner, carry himself as one accustomed to command. Of course, as a subaltern, he had more to do in the way of obeying. He looked as if he followed some sedentary calling, and was, indeed, supposed to be decidedly intellectual. He was a lamb with women, to whose charms he was, as I have hinted, susceptible; but with men he was different, and, I believe, as much of a wolf as was necessary. He had a manner of adoring the handsome, insolent queen of his affections (I will explain in a moment why I call her insolent); indeed, he looked up to her literally as well as sentimentally; for she was the least bit the taller of the two. He had met her the summer before, on the piazza of a hotel at Fort Hamilton, to which, with a brother officer, in a dusty buggy, he had driven over from Brooklyn to spend a tremendously hot Sunday, — the kind of day when the navy-yard was loathsome; and the acquaintance had been renewed by his calling in Twelfth Street on New-Year's Day, — a considerable time to wait for a pretext, but which proved the impression had not been transitory. The acquaintance ripened, thanks to a zealous cultivation (on his part) of occasions

which Providence, it must be confessed, placed at his disposal none too liberally; so that now Georgina took up all his thoughts and a considerable part of his time. He was in love with her, beyond a doubt; but he could not flatter himself that she was in love with him, though she appeared willing (what was so strange) to quarrel with her family about him. He did n't see how she could really care for him, — she seemed marked out by nature for so much greater a fortune; and he used to say to her, "Ah, you don't — there's no use talking, you don't — really care for me at all!" To which she answered, "Really? You are very particular. It seems to me it's real enough if I let you touch one of my finger-tips!" That was one of her ways of being insolent. Another was simply her manner of looking at him, or at other people (when they spoke to her), with her hard, divine blue eye, — looking quietly, amusedly, with the air of considering (wholly from her own point of view) what they might have said, and then turning her head or her back, while, without taking the trouble to answer them, she broke into a short, liquid, irrelevant laugh.

This may seem to contradict what I said just now about her taking the young lieutenant in the navy seriously. What I mean is that she appeared to take him more seriously than she took anything else. She said to him once, "At any rate you have the merit of not being a shop-keeper;" and it was by this epithet she was pleased to designate most of the young men who at that time flourished in the best

society of New York. Even if she had rather a free way of expressing general indifference, a young lady is supposed to be serious enough when she consents to marry you. For the rest, as regards a certain haughtiness that might be observed in Georgina Gressie, my story will probably throw sufficient light upon it. She remarked to Benyon once that it was none of his business why she liked him, but that, to please herself, she did n't mind telling him she thought the great Napoleon, before he was celebrated, before he had command of the army of Italy, must have looked something like him; and she sketched in a few words the sort of figure she imagined the incipient Bonaparte to have been, — short, lean, pale, poor, intellectual, and with a tremendous future under his hat. Benyon asked himself whether *he* had a tremendous future, and what in the world Georgina expected of him in the coming years. He was flattered at the comparison, he was ambitious enough not to be frightened at it, and he guessed that she perceived a certain analogy between herself and the Empress Josephine. She would make a very good empress. That was true; Georgina was remarkably imperial. This may not at first seem to make it more clear why she should take into her favor an aspirant who, on the face of the matter, was not original, and whose Corsica was a flat New England seaport; but it afterward became plain that he owed his brief happiness — it was very brief — to her father's opposition; her father's and her mother's, and even her

uncles' and her aunts'. In those days, in New York, the different members of a family took an interest in its alliances, and the house of Gressie looked askance at an engagement between the most beautiful of its daughters and a young man who was not in a paying business. Georgina declared that they were meddlesome and vulgar,— she could sacrifice her own people, in that way, without a scruple, — and Benyon's position improved from the moment that Mr. Gressie — ill-advised Mr. Gressie — ordered the girl to have nothing to do with him. Georgina was imperial in this — that she would n't put up with an order. When, in the house in Twelfth Street, it began to be talked about that she had better be sent to Europe with some eligible friend, Mrs. Portico, for instance, who was always planning to go, and who wanted as a companion some young mind, fresh from manuals and extracts, to serve as a fountain of history and geography, — when this scheme for getting Georgina out of the way began to be aired, she immediately said to Raymond Benyon, "Oh, yes, I 'll marry you!" She said it in such an off-hand way that, deeply as he desired her, he was almost tempted to answer, "But, my dear, have you really thought about it?"

This little drama went on, in New York, in the ancient days, when Twelfth Street had but lately ceased to be suburban, when the squares had wooden palings, which were not often painted; when there were poplars in important thoroughfares and pigs in the lateral ways; when the theatres were miles dis-

tant from Madison Square, and the battered rotunda of Castle Garden echoed with expensive vocal music; when "the park" meant the grass-plats of the city hall, and the Bloomingdale road was an eligible drive; when Hoboken, of a summer afternoon, was a genteel resort, and the handsomest house in town was on the corner of the Fifth Avenue and Fifteenth Street. This will strike the modern reader, I fear, as rather a primitive epoch; but I am not sure that the strength of human passions is in proportion to the elongation of a city. Several of them, at any rate, the most robust and most familiar, — love, ambition, jealousy, resentment, greed, — subsisted in considerable force in the little circle at which we have glanced, where a view by no means favorable was taken of Raymond Benyon's attentions to Miss Gressie. Unanimity was a family trait among these people (Georgina was an exception), especially in regard to the important concerns of life, such as marriages and closing scenes. The Gressies hung together; they were accustomed to do well for themselves and for each other. They did everything well: got themselves born well (they thought it excellent to be born a Gressie), lived well, married well, died well, and managed to be well spoken of afterward. In deference to this last-mentioned habit, I must be careful what I say of them. They took an interest in each other's concerns, an interest that could never be regarded as of a meddlesome nature, inasmuch as they all thought alike about all their affairs, and interference took the happy form

of congratulation and encouragement. These affairs were invariably lucky, and, as a general thing, no Gressie had anything to do but feel that another Gressie had been almost as shrewd and decided as he himself would have been. The great exception to that, as I have said, was this case of Georgina, who struck such a false note, a note that startled them all, when she told her father that she should like to unite herself to a young man engaged in the least paying business that any Gressie had ever heard of. Her two sisters had married into the most flourishing firms, and it was not to be thought of that — with twenty cousins growing up around her — she should put down the standard of success. Her mother had told her a fortnight before this that she must request Mr. Benyon to cease coming to the house; for hitherto his suit had been of the most public and resolute character. He had been conveyed up town from the Brooklyn ferry, in the "stage," on certain evenings, had asked for Miss Georgina at the door of the house in Twelfth Street, and had sat with her in the front parlor if her parents happened to occupy the back, or in the back if the family had disposed itself in the front. Georgina, in her way, was a dutiful girl, and she immediately repeated her mother's admonition to Benyon. He was not surprised, for though he was aware that he had not, as yet, a great knowledge of society, he flattered himself he could tell when — and where — a young man was not wanted. There were houses in Brooklyn where

such an animal was much appreciated, and there the signs were quite different. They had been discouraging — except on Georgina's part — from the first of his calling in Twelfth Street. Mr. and Mrs. Gressie used to look at each other in silence when he came in, and indulge in strange, perpendicular salutations, without any shaking of hands. People did that at Portsmouth, N. H., when they were glad to see you; but in New York there was more luxuriance, and gesture had a different value. He had never, in Twelfth Street, been asked to "take anything," though the house had a delightful suggestion, a positive aroma, of sideboards, — as if there were mahogany "cellarettes" under every table. The old people, moreover, had repeatedly expressed surprise at the quantity of leisure that officers in the navy seemed to enjoy. The only way in which they had not made themselves offensive was by always remaining in the other room; though at times even this detachment, to which he owed some delightful moments, presented itself to Benyon as a form of disapprobation. Of course, after Mrs. Gressie's message, his visits were practically at an end; he would n't give the girl up, but he would n't be beholden to her father for the opportunity to converse with her. Nothing was left for the tender couple — there was a curious mutual mistrust in their tenderness — but to meet in the squares, or in the topmost streets, or in the sidemost avenues, on the afternoons of spring. It was especially during this phase of their relations

that Georgina struck Benyon as imperial. Her whole person seemed to exhale a tranquil, happy consciousness of having broken a law. She never told him how she arranged the matter at home, how she found it possible always to keep the appointments (to meet him out of the house) that she so boldly made, in what degree she dissimulated to her parents, and how much, in regard to their continued acquaintance, the old people suspected and accepted. If Mr. and Mrs. Gressie had forbidden him the house, it was not, apparently, because they wished her to walk with him in the Tenth Avenue or to sit at his side under the blossoming lilacs in Stuyvesant Square. He did n't believe that she told lies in Twelfth Street; he thought she was too imperial to lie; and he wondered what she said to her mother when, at the end of nearly a whole afternoon of vague peregrination with her lover, this bridling, bristling matron asked her where she had been. Georgina was capable of simply telling the truth; and yet if she simply told the truth, it was a wonder that she had not been simply packed off to Europe.

Benyon's ignorance of her pretexts is a proof that this rather oddly-mated couple never arrived at perfect intimacy, — in spite of a fact which remains to be related. He thought of this afterwards, and thought how strange it was that he had not felt more at liberty to ask her what she did for him, and how she did it, and how much she suffered for him. She would probably not have admitted that she suffered at

all, and she had no wish to pose for a martyr. Benyon remembered this, as I say, in the after years, when he tried to explain to himself certain things which simply puzzled him; it came back to him with the vision, already faded, of shabby cross-streets, straggling toward rivers, with red sunsets, seen through a haze of dust, at the end; a vista through which the figures of a young man and a girl slowly receded and disappeared, — strolling side by side, with the relaxed pace of desultory talk, but more closely linked as they passed into the distance, linked by its at last appearing safe to them — in the Tenth Avenue — that the young lady should take his arm. They were always approaching that inferior thoroughfare; but he could scarcely have told you, in those days, what else they were approaching. He had nothing in the world but his pay, and he felt that this was rather a "mean" income to offer Miss Gressie. Therefore he did n't put it forward; what he offered, instead, was the expression — crude often, and almost boyishly extravagant — of a delighted admiration of her beauty, the tenderest tones of his voice, the softest assurances of his eye and the most insinuating pressure of her hand at those moments when she consented to place it in his arm. All this was an eloquence which, if necessary, might have been condensed into a single sentence; but those few words were scarcely needful, when it was as plain that he expected — in general — she would marry him, as it was indefinite that he counted upon her for living on

a few hundreds a year. If she had been a different girl he might have asked her to wait, — might have talked to her of the coming of better days, of his prospective promotion, of its being wiser, perhaps, that he should leave the navy and look about for a more lucrative career. With Georgina it was difficult to go into such questions; she had no taste whatever for detail. She was delightful as a woman to love, because when a young man is in love he discovers that; but she could not be called helpful, for she never suggested anything. That is, she never had done so till the day she really proposed — for that was the form it took — to become his wife without more delay. "Oh, yes, I will marry you;" these words, which I quoted a little way back, were not so much the answer to something he had said at the moment, as the light conclusion of a report she had just made, for the first time, of her actual situation in her father's house.

"I am afraid I shall have to see less of you," she had begun by saying. "They watch me so much."

"It is very little already," he answered. "What is once or twice a week?"

"That's easy for you to say. You are your own master, but you don't know what I go through."

"Do they make it very bad for you, dearest? Do they make scenes?" Benyon asked.

"No, of course not. Don't you know us enough to know how we behave? No scenes, — that would be a relief. However, I never make them myself,

and I never will — that 's one comfort for you, for the future, if you want to know. Father and mother keep very quiet, looking at me as if I were one of the lost, with hard, screwing eyes, like gimlets. To me they scarcely say anything, but they talk it all over with each other, and try and decide what is to be done. It 's my belief that father has written to the people in Washington — what do you call it? the Department — to have you moved away from Brooklyn, — to have you sent to sea."

"I guess that won't do much good. They want me in Brooklyn, they don't want me at sea."

"Well, they are capable of going to Europe for a year, on purpose to take me," Georgina said.

"How can they take you, if you won't go? And if you should go, what good would it do, if you were only to find me here when you came back, just the same as you left me?"

"Oh, well!" said Georgina, with her lovely smile, "of course they think that absence would cure me of — cure me of — " And she paused, with a certain natural modesty, not saying exactly of what.

"Cure you of what, darling? Say it, please say it," the young man murmured, drawing her hand surreptitiously into his arm.

"Of my absurd infatuation!"

"And would it, dearest?"

"Yes, very likely. But I don't mean to try. I sha'n't go to Europe, — not when I don't want to. But it 's better I should see less of you, — even that I should appear — a little — to give you up."

"A little? What do you call a little?"

Georgina said nothing, for a moment. "Well, that, for instance, you should n't hold my hand quite so tight!" And she disengaged this conscious member from the pressure of his arm.

"What good will that do?" Benyon asked.

"It will make them think it 's all over,— that we have agreed to part."

"And as we have done nothing of the kind, how will that help us?"

They had stopped at the crossing of a street; a heavy dray was lumbering slowly past them. Georgina, as she stood there, turned her face to her lover, and rested her eyes for some moments on his own. At last: "Nothing will help us; I don't think we are very happy," she answered, while her strange, ironical, inconsequent smile played about her beautiful lips.

"I don't understand how you see things. I thought you were going to say you would marry me!" Benyon rejoined, standing there still, though the dray had passed.

"Oh, yes, I will marry you!" And she moved away, across the street. That was the manner in which she had said it, and it was very characteristic of her. When he saw that she really meant it, he wished they were somewhere else, — he hardly knew where the proper place would be, — so that he might take her in his arms. Nevertheless, before they separated that day he had said to her he hoped she remembered they

would be very poor, reminding her how great a change she would find it. She answered that she should n't mind, and presently she said that if this was all that prevented them the sooner they were married the better. The next time he saw her she was quite of the same opinion; but he found, to his surprise, it was now her conviction that she had better not leave her father's house. The ceremony should take place secretly, of course; but they would wait awhile to let their union be known.

"What good will it do us, then?" Raymond Benyon asked.

Georgina colored. "Well, if you don't know, I can't tell you!"

Then it seemed to him that he did know. Yet, at the same time, he could not see why, once the knot was tied, secrecy should be required. When he asked what special event they were to wait for, and what should give them the signal to appear as man and wife, she answered that her parents would probably forgive her, if they were to discover, not too abruptly, after six months, that she had taken the great step. Benyon supposed that she had ceased to care whether they forgave her or not; but he had already perceived that women are full of inconsistencies. He had believed her capable of marrying him out of bravado, but the pleasure of defiance was absent if the marriage was kept to themselves. Now, too, it appeared that she was not especially anxious to defy, — she was disposed rather to manage, to

cultivate opportunities and reap the fruits of a waiting game.

"Leave it to me. Leave it to me. You are only a blundering man," Georgina said. "I shall know much better than you the right moment for saying, 'Well, you may as well make the best of it, because we have already done it!'"

That might very well be, but Benyon did n't quite understand, and he was awkwardly anxious (for a lover) till it came over him afresh that there was one thing at any rate in his favor, which was simply that the loveliest girl he had ever seen was ready to throw herself into his arms. When he said to her, "There is one thing I hate in this plan of yours, — that, for ever so few weeks, so few days, your father should support my wife," — when he made this homely remark, with a little flush of sincerity in his face, she gave him a specimen of that unanswerable laugh of hers, and declared that it would serve Mr. Gressie right for being so barbarous and so horrid. It was Benyon's view that from the moment she disobeyed her father, she ought to cease to avail herself of his protection; but I am bound to add that he was not particularly surprised at finding this a kind of honor in which her feminine nature was little versed. To make her his wife first — at the earliest moment — whenever she would, and trust to fortune, and the new influence he should have, to give him, as soon thereafter as possible, complete possession of her, — this rather promptly presented itself to the young

man as the course most worthy of a person of spirit. He would be only a pedant who would take nothing because he could not get everything at once. They wandered further than usual this afternoon, and the dusk was thick by the time he brought her back to her father's door. It was not his habit to come so near it, but to-day they had so much to talk about that he actually stood with her for ten minutes at the foot of the steps. He was keeping her hand in his, and she let it rest there while she said, — by way of a remark that should sum up all their reasons and reconcile their differences, —

"There 's one great thing it will do, you know; it will make me safe."

"Safe from what?"

"From marrying any one else."

"Ah, my girl, if you were to do that — !" Benyon exclaimed; but he did n't mention the other branch of the contingency. Instead of this, he looked up at the blind face of the house — there were only dim lights in two or three windows, and no apparent eyes — and up and down the empty street, vague in the friendly twilight; after which he drew Georgina Gressie to his breast and gave her a long, passionate kiss. Yes, decidedly, he felt, they had better be married. She had run quickly up the steps, and while she stood there, with her hand on the bell, she almost hissed at him, under her breath, "Go away, go away; Amanda's coming!" Amanda was the parlor-maid, and it was in those terms that the Twelfth Street

Juliet dismissed her Brooklyn Romeo. As he wandered back into the Fifth Avenue, where the evening air was conscious of a vernal fragrance from the shrubs in the little precinct of the pretty Gothic church ornamenting that charming part of the street, he was too absorbed in the impression of the delightful contact from which the girl had violently released herself to reflect that the great reason she had mentioned a moment before was a reason for their marrying, of course, but not in the least a reason for their not making it public. But, as I said in the opening lines of this chapter, if he did not understand his mistress's motives at the end, he cannot be expected to have understood them at the beginning.

## II.

MRS. PORTICO, as we know, was always talking about going to Europe; but she had not yet — I mean a year after the incident I have just related — put her hand upon a youthful cicerone. Petticoats, of course, were required; it was necessary that her companion should be of the sex which sinks most naturally upon benches, in galleries and cathredrals, and pauses most frequently upon staircases that ascend to celebrated views. She was a widow, with a good fortune and several sons, all of whom were in Wall Street, and none of them capable of the relaxed pace at which she expected to take her foreign tour. They were all in a state

of tension. They went through life standing. She was a short, broad, high-colored woman, with a loud voice, and superabundant black hair, arranged in a way peculiar to herself, — with so many combs and bands that it had the appearance of a national coiffure. There was an impression in New York, about 1845, that the style was Danish; some one had said something about having seen it in Schleswig-Holstein. Mrs. Portico had a bold, humorous, slightly flamboyant look; people who saw her for the first time received an impression that her late husband had married the daughter of a barkeeper or the proprietress of a menagerie. Her high, hoarse, good-natured voice seemed to connect her in some way with public life; it was not pretty enough to suggest that she might have been an actress. These ideas quickly passed away, however, even if you were not sufficiently initiated to know — as all the Gressies, for instance, knew so well — that her origin, so far from being enveloped in mystery, was almost the sort of thing she might have boasted of. But in spite of the high pitch of her appearance, she didn't boast of anything; she was a genial, easy, comical, irreverent person, with a large charity, a democratic, fraternizing turn of mind, and a contempt for many worldly standards, which she expressed not in the least in general axioms (for she had a mortal horror of philosophy), but in violent ejaculations on particular occasions. She had not a grain of moral timidity, and she fronted a

delicate social problem as sturdily as she would have barred the way of a gentleman she might have met in her vestibule with the plate-chest. The only thing which prevented her being a bore in orthodox circles was that she was incapable of discussion. She never lost her temper, but she lost her vocabulary, and ended quickly by praying that Heaven would give her an opportunity to *show* what she believed.

She was an old friend of Mr. and Mrs. Gressie, who esteemed her for the antiquity of her lineage and the frequency of her subscriptions, and to whom she rendered the service of making them feel liberal, — like people too sure of their own position to be frightened. She was their indulgence, their dissipation, their point of contact with dangerous heresies; so long as they continued to see her they could not be accused of being narrow-minded, — a matter as to which they were perhaps vaguely conscious of the necessity of taking their precautions. Mrs. Portico never asked herself whether she liked the Gressies; she had no disposition for morbid analysis, she accepted transmitted associations, and she found, somehow, that her acquaintance with these people helped her to relieve herself. She was always making scenes in their drawing-room, scenes half indignant, half jocose, like all her manifestations, to which it must be confessed that they adapted themselves beautifully. They never "met" her in the language of controversy; but always collected to watch her, with smiles and comfortable platitudes, as if they envied her superior

richness of temperament. She took an interest in Georgina, who seemed to her different from the others, with suggestions about her of being likely not to marry so unrefreshingly as her sisters had done, and of a high, bold standard of duty. Her sisters had married from duty, but Mrs. Portico would rather have chopped off one of her large, plump hands than behave herself so well as that. She had, in her daughterless condition, a certain ideal of a girl that should be beautiful and romantic, with lustrous eyes, and a little persecuted, so that she, Mrs. Portico, might get her out of her troubles. She looked to Georgina, to a considerable degree, to gratify her in this way; but she had really never understood Georgina at all. She ought to have been shrewd, but she lacked this refinement, and she never understood anything until after many disappointments and vexations. It was difficult to startle her, but she was much startled by a communication that this young lady made her one fine spring morning. With her florid appearance and her speculative mind, she was probably the most innocent woman in New York.

Georgina came very early,—earlier even than visits were paid in New York thirty years ago; and instantly, without any preface, looking her straight in the face, told Mrs. Portico that she was in great trouble and must appeal to her for assistance. Georgina had in her aspect no symptom of distress; she was as fresh and beautiful as the April day itself; she held

up her head and smiled, with a sort of familiar bravado, looking like a young woman who would naturally be on good terms with fortune. It was not in the least in the tone of a person making a confession or relating a misadventure that she presently said: "Well, you must know, to begin with — of course, it will surprise you — that I 'm married."

"Married, Georgina Gressie!" Mrs. Portico repeated in her most resonant tones.

Georgina got up, walked with her majestic step across the room, and closed the door. Then she stood there, her back pressed against the mahogany panels, indicating only by the distance she had placed between herself and her hostess the consciousness of an irregular position. "I am not Georgina Gressie! I am Georgina Benyon, — and it has become plain, within a short time, that the natural consequence will take place."

Mrs. Portico was altogether bewildered. "The natural consequence?" she exclaimed, staring.

"Of one's being married, of course, — I suppose you know what that is. No one must know anything about it. I want you to take me to Europe."

Mrs. Portico now slowly rose from her place, and approached her visitor, looking at her from head to foot as she did so, as if to challenge the truth of her remarkable announcement. She rested her hands on Georgina's shoulders a moment, gazing into her blooming face, and then she drew her closer and kissed her. In this way the girl was conducted back to the sofa,

where, in a conversation of extreme intimacy, she opened Mrs. Portico's eyes wider than they had ever been opened before. She was Raymond Benyon's wife; they had been married a year, but no one knew anything about it. She had kept it from every one, and she meant to go on keeping it. The ceremony had taken place in a little Episcopal church at Harlem, one Sunday afternoon, after the service. There was no one in that dusty suburb who knew them; the clergyman, vexed at being detained, and wanting to go home to tea, had made no trouble; he tied the knot before they could turn round. It was ridiculous how easy it had been. Raymond had told him frankly that it must all be under the rose, as the young lady's family disapproved of what she was doing. But she was of legal age, and perfectly free; he could see that for himself. The parson had given a grunt as he looked at her over his spectacles. It was not very complimentary; it seemed to say that she was indeed no chicken. Of course she looked old for a girl; but she was not a girl now, was she? Raymond had certified his own identity as an officer in the United States Navy (he had papers, besides his uniform, which he wore), and introduced the clergyman to a friend he had brought with him, who was also in the navy, a venerable paymaster. It was he who gave Georgina away, as it were; he was an old, old man, a regular grandmother, and perfectly safe. He had been married three times himself. After the ceremony she went back to her father's; but she saw Mr. Benyon

the next day. After that, she saw him — for a little while — pretty often. He was always begging her to come to him altogether; she must do him that justice. But she would n't — she would n't now — perhaps she would n't ever. She had her reasons, which seemed to her very good, but were very difficult to explain. She would tell Mrs. Portico in plenty of time what they were. But that was not the question now, whether they were good or bad; the question was for her to get away from the country for several months, — far away from any one who had ever known her. She would like to go to some little place in Spain or Italy, where she should be out of the world until everything was over.

Mrs. Portico's heart gave a jump as this serene, handsome, familiar girl, sitting there with a hand in hers, and pouring forth this extraordinary tale, spoke of everything being over. There was a glossy coldness in it, an unnatural lightness, which suggested — poor Mrs. Portico scarcely knew what. If Georgina was to become a mother, it was to be supposed she was to remain a mother. She said there was a beautiful place in Italy — Genoa — of which Raymond had often spoken — and where he had been more than once, — he admired it so much; could n't they go there and be quiet for a little while? She was asking a great favor, — that she knew very well; but if Mrs. Portico would n't take her, she would find some one who would. They had talked of such a journey so often; and, certainly, if Mrs.

Portico had been willing before, she ought to be much more willing now. The girl declared that she must do something, — go somewhere, — keep, in one way or another, her situation unperceived. There was no use talking to her about telling, — she would rather die than tell. No doubt it seemed strange, but she knew what she was about. No one had guessed anything yet, — she had succeeded perfectly in doing what she wished, — and her father and mother believed — as Mrs. Portico had believed, — had n't she? — that, any time the last year, Raymond Benyon was less to her than he had been before. Well, so he was; yes, he was. He had gone away — he was off, Heaven knew where — in the Pacific; she was alone, and now she would remain alone. The family believed it was all over, — with his going back to his ship, and other things, and they were right: for it *was* over, or it would be soon.

Mrs. Portico, by this time, had grown almost afraid of her young friend; *she* had so little fear, she had even, as it were, so little shame. If the good lady had been accustomed to analyzing things a little more, she would have said she had so little conscience. She looked at Georgina with dilated eyes, — her visitor was so much the calmer of the two, — and exclaimed, and murmured, and sunk back, and sprung forward, and wiped her forehead with her pocket-handkerchief. There were things she did n't understand; that they should all have been so deceived, that they should have thought Georgina was giving

her lover up (they flattered themselves she was discouraged, or had grown tired of him), when she was really only making it impossible she should belong to any one else. And with this, her inconsequence, her capriciousness, her absence of motive, the way she contradicted herself, her apparent belief that she could hush up such a situation forever! There was nothing shameful in having married poor Mr. Benyon, even in a little church at Harlem, and being given away by a paymaster. It was much more shameful to be in such a state without being prepared to make the proper explanations. And she must have seen very little of her husband; she must have given him up — so far as meeting him went — almost as soon as she had taken him. Had not Mrs. Gressie herself told Mrs. Portico (in the preceding October, it must have been) that there now would be no need of sending Georgina away, inasmuch as the affair with the little navy man — a project in every way so unsuitable — had quite blown over?

"After our marriage I saw him less, I saw him a great deal less," Georgina explained; but her explanation only appeared to make the mystery more dense.

"I don't see, in that case, what on earth you married him for!"

"We had to be more careful; I wished to appear to have given him up. Of course we were really more intimate, — I saw him differently," Georgina said, smiling.

"I should think so! I can't for the life of me see why you were n't discovered."

"All I can say is we were n't. No doubt it's remarkable. We managed very well, — that is, I managed, — he did n't want to manage at all. And then, father and mother are incredibly stupid!"

Mrs. Portico exhaled a comprehensive moan, feeling glad, on the whole, that she had n't a daughter, while Georgina went on to furnish a few more details. Raymond Benyon, in the summer, had been ordered from Brooklyn to Charlestown, near Boston, where, as Mrs. Portico perhaps knew, there was another navy-yard, in which there was a temporary press of work, requiring more oversight. He had remained there several months, during which he had written to her urgently to come to him, and during which, as well, he had received notice that he was to rejoin his ship a little later. Before doing so he came back to Brooklyn for a few weeks to wind up his work there, and then she had seen him — well, pretty often. That was the best time of all the year that had elapsed since their marriage. It was a wonder at home that nothing had then been guessed; because she had really been reckless, and Benyon had even tried to force on a disclosure. But they *were* stupid, that was very certain. He had besought her again and again to put an end to their false position, but she did n't want it any more than she had wanted it before. They had rather a bad parting; in fact, for a pair of lovers, it was a very queer parting indeed. He

did n't know, now, the thing she had come to tell Mrs. Portico. She had not written to him. He was on a very long cruise. It might be two years before he returned to the United States. "I don't care how long he stays away," Georgina said, very simply.

"You have n't mentioned why you married him. Perhaps you don't remember," Mrs. Portico broke out, with her masculine laugh.

"Oh, yes; I loved him!"

"And you have got over that?"

Georgina hesitated a moment. "Why, no, Mrs. Portico, of course I have n't; Raymond's a splendid fellow."

"Then why don't you live with him? You don't explain that."

"What would be the use when he 's always away? How can one live with a man that spends half his life in the South Seas? If he was n't in the navy it would be different; but to go through everything,— I mean everything that making our marriage known would bring upon me,— the scolding and the exposure and the ridicule, the scenes at home, — to go through it all, just for the idea, and yet be alone here, just as I was before, without my husband after all, — with none of the good of him,"—and here Georgina looked at her hostess as if with the certitude that such an enumeration of inconveniences would touch her effectually,— "really, Mrs. Portico, I am bound to say I don't think that would be worth while; I have n't the courage for it."

"I never thought you were a coward," said Mrs. Portico.

"Well, I am not, — if you will give me time. I am very patient."

"I never thought that, either."

"Marrying changes one," said Georgina, still smiling.

"It certainly seems to have had a very peculiar effect upon you. Why don't you make him leave the navy, and arrange your life comfortably, like every one else?"

"I would n't for the world interfere with his prospects — with his promotion. That is sure to come for him, and to come quickly, he has such talents. He is devoted to his profession; it would ruin him to leave it."

"My dear young woman, you are a wonderful creature!" Mrs. Portico exclaimed, looking at her companion as if she had been in a glass case.

"So poor Raymond says," Georgina answered, smiling more than ever.

"Certainly, I should have been very sorry to marry a navy man; but if I had married him, I should stick to him, in the face of all the scoldings in the universe!"

"I don't know what your parents may have been; I know what mine are," Georgina replied, with some dignity. "When he's a captain, we shall come out of hiding."

"And what shall you do meanwhile? What will

you do with your children? Where will you hide them? What will you do with this one?"

Georgina rested her eyes on her lap for a minute; then, raising them, she met those of Mrs. Portico. "Somewhere in Europe," she said, in her sweet tone.

"Georgina Gressie, you're a monster!" the elder lady cried.

"I know what I am about, and you will help me," the girl went on.

"I will go and tell your father and mother the whole story, — that's what I will do!"

"I am not in the least afraid of that, not in the least. You will help me, — I assure you that you will."

"Do you mean I will support the child?"

Georgina broke into a laugh. "I do believe you would, if I were to ask you! But I won't go so far as that; I have something of my own. All I want you to do is to be with me."

"At Genoa, — yes, you have got it all fixed! You say Mr. Benyon is so fond of the place. That's all very well; but how will he like his infant being deposited there?"

"He won't like it at all. You see I tell you the whole truth," said Georgina, gently.

"Much obliged; it's a pity you keep it all for me! It is in his power, then, to make you behave properly. *He* can publish your marriage if you won't; and if he does you will have to acknowledge your child."

"Publish, Mrs. Portico? How little you know my Raymond! He will never break a promise; he will go through fire first."

"And what have you got him to promise?"

"Never to insist on a disclosure against my will; never to claim me openly as his wife till I think it is time; never to let any one know what has passed between us if I choose to keep it still a secret — to keep it for years — to keep it forever. Never to do anything in the matter himself, but to leave it to me. For this he has given me his solemn word of honor. And I know what that means!"

Mrs. Portico, on the sofa, fairly bounded.

"You *do* know what you are about. And Mr. Benyon strikes me as more fantastic even than yourself. I never heard of a man taking such an imbecile vow. What good can it do him?"

"What good? The good it did him was that it gratified me. At the time he took it he would have made any promise under the sun. It was a condition I exacted just at the very last, before the marriage took place. There was nothing at that moment he would have refused me; there was nothing I could n't have made him do. He was in love to that degree — but I don't want to boast," said Georgina, with quiet grandeur. "He wanted — he wanted —" she added; but then she paused.

"He does n't seem to have wanted much!" Mrs. Portico cried, in a tone which made Georgina turn to the window, as if it might have reached the street.

Her hostess noticed the movement and went on: "Oh, my dear, if I ever do tell your story, I will tell it so that people will hear it!"

"You never will tell it. What I mean is, that Raymond wanted the sanction — of the affair at the church — because he saw that I would never do without it. Therefore, for him, the sooner we had it the better, and, to hurry it on, he was ready to take any pledge."

"You have got it pat enough," said Mrs. Portico, in homely phrase. "I don't know what you mean by sanctions, or what *you* wanted of 'em!"

Georgina got up, holding rather higher than before that beautiful head which, in spite of the embarrassments of this interview, had not yet perceptibly abated of its elevation. "Would you have liked me to — to not marry?"

Mrs. Portico rose also, and, flushed with the agitation of unwonted knowledge, — it was as if she had discovered a skeleton in her favorite cupboard, — faced her young friend for a moment. Then her conflicting sentiments resolved themselves into an abrupt question, uttered, — for Mrs. Portico, — with much solemnity: "Georgina Gressie, were you really in love with him?"

The question suddenly dissipated the girl's strange, studied, wilful coldness; she broke out, with a quick flash of passion, — a passion that, for the moment, was predominantly anger, "Why else, in Heaven's name, should I have done what I have done? Why

else should I have married him? What under the sun had I to gain?"

A certain quiver in Georgina's voice, a light in her eye which seemed to Mrs. Portico more spontaneous, more human, as she uttered these words, caused them to affect her hostess rather less painfully than anything she had yet said. She took the girl's hand and emitted indefinite, admonitory sounds. "Help me, my dear old friend, help me," Georgina continued, in a low, pleading tone; and in a moment Mrs. Portico saw that the tears were in her eyes.

"You 're a queer mixture, my child," she exclaimed. "Go straight home to your own mother, and tell her everything; that is your best help."

"You are kinder than my mother. You must n't judge her by yourself."

"What can she do to you? How can she hurt you? We are not living in pagan times," said Mrs. Portico, who was seldom so historical. "Besides, you have no reason to speak of your mother — to think of her, even — so! She would have liked you to marry a man of some property; but she has always been a good mother to you."

At this rebuke Georgina suddenly kindled again; she was, indeed, as Mrs. Portico had said, a queer mixture. Conscious, evidently, that she could not satisfactorily justify her present stiffness, she wheeled round upon a grievance which absolved her from self-defence. "Why, then, did he make that promise, if he loved me? No man who really loved me would

have made it, — and no man that was a man, as I understand being a man! He might have seen that I only did it to test him, — to see if he wanted to take advantage of being left free himself. It is a proof that he does n't love me, — not as he ought to have done; and in such a case as that a woman is n't bound to make sacrifices!"

Mrs. Portico was not a person of a nimble intellect; her mind moved vigorously, but heavily; yet she sometimes made happy guesses. She saw that Georgina's emotions were partly real and partly fictitious; that, as regards this last matter, especially, she was trying to "get up" a resentment, in order to excuse herself. The pretext was absurd, and the good lady was struck with its being heartless on the part of her young visitor to reproach poor Benyon with a concession on which she had insisted, and which could only be a proof of his devotion, inasmuch as he left her free while he bound himself. Altogether, Mrs. Portico was shocked and dismayed at such a want of simplicity in the behavior of a young person whom she had hitherto believed to be as candid as she was elegant, and her appreciation of this discovery expressed itself in the uncompromising remark: "You strike me as a very bad girl, my dear; you strike me as a very bad girl!"

# PART II.

## III.

It will doubtless seem to the reader very singular that, in spite of this reflection, which appeared to sum up her judgment of the matter, Mrs. Portico should, in the course of a very few days, have consented to everything that Georgina asked of her. I have thought it well to narrate at length the first conversation that took place between them, but I shall not trace further the details of the girl's hard pleading, or the steps by which — in the face of a hundred robust and salutary convictions — the loud, kind, sharp, simple, sceptical, credulous woman took under her protection a damsel whose obstinacy she could not speak of without getting red with anger. It was the simple fact of Georgina's personal condition that moved her; this young lady's greatest eloquence was the seriousness of her predicament. She might be bad, and she had a splendid, careless, insolent, fair-faced way of admitting it, which at moments, incoherently, inconsistently, and irresistibly, resolved the harsh confession into tears of weakness; but Mrs. Portico had known her from her rosiest years, and when Georgina declared that she could n't go home, that she wished to be with her and not with her

mother, that she could n't expose herself, — how could she? — and that she must remain with her and her only till the day they should sail, the poor lady was forced to make that day a reality. She was overmastered, she was cajoled, she was, to a certain extent, fascinated. She had to accept Georgina's rigidity (she had none of her own to oppose to it; she was only violent, she was not continuous), and once she did this, it was plain, after all, that to take her young friend to Europe was to help her, and to leave her alone was not to help her. Georgina literally frightened Mrs. Portico into compliance. She was evidently capable of strange things if thrown upon her own devices.

So, from one day to another Mrs. Portico announced that she was really at last about to sail for foreign lands (her doctor having told her that if she did n't look out she would get too old to enjoy them), and that she had invited that robust Miss Gressie, who could stand so long on her feet, to accompany her. There was joy in the house of Gressie at this announcement, for though the danger was over, it was a great general advantage to Georgina to go, and the Gressies were always elated at the prospect of an advantage. There was a danger that she might meet Mr. Benyon on the other side of the world; but it did n't seem likely that Mrs. Portico would lend herself to a plot of that kind. If she had taken it into her head to favor their love affair, she would have done it frankly, and Georgina would have been

married by this time. Her arrangements were made as quickly as her decision had been — or rather had appeared — slow; for this concerned those agile young men down town. Georgina was perpetually at her house; it was understood in Twelfth Street that she was talking over her future travels with her kind friend. Talk there was, of course, to a considerable degree; but after it was settled they should start nothing more was said about the motive of the journey. Nothing was said, that is, till the night before they sailed; then a few words passed between them. Georgina had already taken leave of her relations in Twelfth Street, and was to sleep at Mrs. Portico's in order to go down to the ship at an early hour. The two ladies were sitting together in the firelight, silent, with the consciousness of corded luggage, when the elder one suddenly remarked to her companion that she seemed to be taking a great deal upon herself in assuming that Raymond Benyon would n't force her hand. *He* might choose to acknowledge his child, if she did n't; there were promises and promises, and many people would consider they had been let off when circumstances were so altered. She would have to reckon with Mr. Benyon more than she thought.

"I know what I am about," Georgina answered. "There is only one promise, for him. I don't know what you mean by circumstances being altered."

"Everything seems to me to be changed," poor Mrs. Portico murmured, rather tragically.

"Well, he is n't, and he never will! I am sure of him, — as sure as that I sit here. Do you think I would have looked at him if I had n't known he was a man of his word?"

"You have chosen him well, my dear," said Mrs. Portico, who by this time was reduced to a kind of bewildered acquiescence.

"Of course I have chosen him well! In such a matter as this he will be perfectly splendid." Then suddenly, "Perfectly splendid, — that's why I cared for him!" she repeated, with a flash of incongruous passion.

This seemed to Mrs. Portico audacious to the point of being sublime; but she had given up trying to understand anything that the girl might say or do. She understood less and less, after they had disembarked in England and begun to travel southward; and she understood least of all when, in the middle of the winter, the event came off with which, in imagination, she had tried to familiarize herself, but which, when it occurred, seemed to her beyond measure strange and dreadful. It took place at Genoa, for Georgina had made up her mind that there would be more privacy in a big town than in a little; and she wrote to America that both Mrs. Portico and she had fallen in love with the place and would spend two or three months there. At that time people in the United States knew much less than to-day about the comparative attractions of foreign cities, and it was not thought surprising that absent New Yorkers

should wish to linger in a seaport where they might find apartments, according to Georgina's report, in a palace painted in fresco by Vandyke and Titian. Georgina, in her letters, omitted, it will be seen, no detail that could give color to Mrs. Portico's long stay at Genoa. In such a palace — where the travellers hired twenty gilded rooms for the most insignificant sum — a remarkably fine boy came into the world. Nothing could have been more successful and comfortable than this transaction. Mrs. Portico was almost appalled at the facility and felicity of it. She was by this time in a pretty bad way, and — what had never happened to her before in her life — she suffered from chronic depression of spirits. She hated to have to lie, and now she was lying all the time. Everything she wrote home, everything that had been said or done in connection with their stay in Genoa, was a lie. The way they remained indoors to avoid meeting chance compatriots was a lie. Compatriots, in Genoa, at that period, were very rare; but nothing could exceed the business-like completeness of Georgina's precautions. Her nerves, her self-possession, her apparent want of feeling, excited on Mrs. Portico's part a kind of gloomy suspense; a morbid anxiety to see how far her companion would go took possession of the excellent woman, who, a few months before, hated to fix her mind on disagreeable things.

Georgina went very far indeed; she did everything in her power to dissimulate the origin of her child. The record of its birth was made under a false

name, and he was baptized at the nearest church by a Catholic priest. A magnificent contadina was brought to light by the doctor in a village in the hills, and this big, brown, barbarous creature, who, to do her justice, was full of handsome, familiar smiles and coarse tenderness, was constituted nurse to Raymond Benyon's son. She nursed him for a fortnight under the mother's eye, and she was then sent back to her village with the baby in her arms and sundry gold coin knotted into a corner of her rude pocket-handkerchief. Mr. Gressie had given his daughter a liberal letter of credit on a London banker, and she was able, for the present, to make abundant provision for the little one. She called Mrs. Portico's attention to the fact that she spent none of her money on futilities; she kept it all for her small pensioner in the Genoese hills. Mrs. Portico beheld these strange doings with a stupefaction that occasionally broke into passionate protest; then she relapsed into a brooding sense of having now been an accomplice so far that she must be an accomplice to the end. The two ladies went down to Rome — Georgina was in wonderful trim — to finish the season, and here Mrs. Portico became convinced that she intended to abandon her offspring. She had not driven into the country to see the nursling before leaving Genoa, — she had said that she could n't bear to see it in such a place and among such people. Mrs. Portico, it must be added, had felt the force of this plea, — felt it as regards a plan of her own, given up after being

hotly entertained for a few hours, of devoting a day, by herself, to a visit to the big contadina. It seemed to her that if she should see the child in the sordid hands to which Georgina had consigned it she would become still more of a participant than she was already.

This young woman's blooming hardness, after they got to Rome, acted upon her like a kind of Medusa-mask. She had seen a horrible thing, she had been mixed up with it, and her motherly heart had received a mortal chill. It became more clear to her every day that, though Georgina would continue to send the infant money in considerable quantities, she had dispossessed herself of it forever. Together with this induction a fixed idea settled in her mind, — the project of taking the baby herself, of making him her own, of arranging that matter with the father. The countenance she had given Georgina up to this point was an effective pledge that she would not expose her; but she could adopt the child without exposing her; she could say that he was a lovely baby — he was lovely, fortunately — whom she had picked up in a poor village in Italy, — a village that had been devastated by brigands. She would pretend — she could pretend; oh, yes, of course, she could pretend! Everything was imposture now, and she could go on to lie as she had begun. The falsity of the whole business sickened her; it made her so yellow that she scarcely knew herself in her glass. None the less, to rescue the child, even if she had to become falser still, would be in some measure an atonement

for the treachery to which she had already lent herself. She began to hate Georgina, who had drawn her into such an atrocious current, and if it had not been for two considerations she would have insisted on their separating. One was the deference she owed to Mr. and Mrs. Gressie, who had reposed such a trust in her; the other was that she must keep hold of the mother till she had got possession of the infant. Meanwhile, in this forced communion, her aversion to her companion increased; Georgina came to appear to her a creature of brass, of iron; she was exceedingly afraid of her, and it seemed to her now a wonder of wonders that she should ever have trusted her enough to come so far. Georgina showed no consciousness of the change in Mrs. Portico, though there was, indeed, at present, not even a pretence of confidence between the two. Miss Gressie — that was another lie, to which Mrs. Portico had to lend herself — was bent on enjoying Europe, and was especially delighted with Rome. She certainly had the courage of her undertaking, and she confessed to Mrs. Portico that she had left Raymond Benyon, and meant to continue to leave him, in ignorance of what had taken place at Genoa. There was a certain confidence, it must be said, in that. He was now in Chinese waters, and she probably should not see him for years.

Mrs. Portico took counsel with herself, and the result of her cogitation was, that she wrote to Mr. Benyon that a charming little boy had been born

to him, and that Georgina had put him to nurse with Italian peasants, but that, if he would kindly consent to it, she, Mrs. Portico, would bring him up much better than that. She knew not how to address her letter, and Georgina, even if *she* should know, which was doubtful, would never tell her; so she sent the missive to the care of the Secretary of the Navy, at Washington, with an earnest request that it might immediately be forwarded. Such was Mrs. Portico's last effort in this strange business of Georgina's. I relate rather a complicated fact in a very few words when I say that the poor lady's anxieties, indignations, repentances, preyed upon her until they fairly broke her down. Various persons whom she knew in Rome notified her that the air of the Seven Hills was plainly unfavorable to her, and she had made up her mind to return to her native land, when she found that, in her depressed condition, malarial fever had laid its hand upon her. She was unable to move, and the matter was settled for her in the course of an illness which, happily, was not prolonged. I have said that she was not obstinate, and the resistance that she made on the present occasion was not worthy even of her spasmodic energy. Brain-fever made its appearance, and she died at the end of three weeks, during which Georgina's attentions to her patient and protectress had been unremitting. There were other Americans in Rome who, after this sad event, extended to the bereaved young lady every comfort and hospitality. She had no lack of opportunities

for returning under a proper escort to New York. She selected, you may be sure, the best, and re-entered her father's house, where she took to plain dressing; for she sent all her pocket-money, with the utmost secrecy, to the little boy in the Genoese hills.

## IV.

"WHY should he come if he doesn't like you? He is under no obligation, and he has his ship to look after. Why should he sit for an hour at a time, and why should he be so pleasant?"

"Do you think he is very pleasant?" Kate Theory asked, turning away her face from her sister. It was important that Mildred should not see how little the expression of that charming countenance corresponded with the inquiry.

This precaution was useless, however, for in a moment Mildred said, from the delicately draped couch, where she lay at the open window, "Kate Theory, don't be affected!"

"Perhaps it's for you he comes. I don't see why he should n't; you are far more attractive than I, and you have a great deal more to say. How can he help seeing that you are the cleverest of the clever? You can talk to him of everything: of the dates of the different eruptions, of the statues and bronzes in the Museum, which you have never seen, poor darling! but which you know more about than he does, than any one does. What was it you began on last time? Oh, yes, you poured forth floods about Magna

Græcia. And then — and then —" But with this Kate Theory paused; she felt it would n't do to speak the words that had risen to her lips. That her sister was as beautiful as a saint, and as delicate and refined as an angel, — she had been on the point of saying something of that sort. But Mildred's beauty and delicacy were the fairness of mortal disease, and to praise her for her refinement was simply to intimate that she had the tenuity of a consumptive. So, after she had checked herself, the younger girl — she was younger only by a year or two — simply kissed her tenderly, and settled the knot of the lace handkerchief that was tied over her head. Mildred knew what she had been going to say, — knew why she had stopped. Mildred knew everything, without ever leaving her room, or leaving, at least, that little salon of their own, at the *pension*, which she had made so pretty by simply lying there, at the window that had the view of the bay and of Vesuvius, and telling Kate how to arrange and rearrange everything. Since it began to be plain that Mildred must spend her small remnant of years altogether in warm climates, the lot of the two sisters had been cast in the ungarnished hostelries of southern Europe. Their little sitting-room was sure to be very ugly, and Mildred was never happy till it was rearranged. Her sister fell to work, as a matter of course, the first day, and changed the place of all the tables, sofas, chairs, till every combination had been tried, and the invalid thought at last that there was a little effect.

Kate Theory had a taste of her own, and her ideas were not always the same as her sister's; but she did whatever Mildred liked, and if the poor girl had told her to put the door-mat on the dining-table, or the clock under the sofa, she would have obeyed without a murmur. Her own ideas, her personal tastes, had been folded up and put away, like garments out of season, in drawers and trunks, with camphor and lavender. They were not, as a general thing, for southern wear, however indispensable to comfort in the climate of New England, where poor Mildred had lost her health. Kate Theory, ever since this event, had lived for her companion, and it was almost an inconvenience for her to think that she was attractive to Captain Benyon. It was as if she had shut up her house and was not in a position to entertain. So long as Mildred should live, her own life was suspended; if there should be any time afterwards, perhaps she would take it up again; but for the present, in answer to any knock at her door, she could only call down from one of her dusty windows that she was not at home. Was it really in these terms she should have to dismiss Captain Benyon? If Mildred said it was for her he came she must perhaps take upon herself such a duty; for, as we have seen, Mildred knew everything, and she must therefore be right. She knew about the statues in the Museum, about the excavations at Pompeii, about the antique splendor of Magna Græcia. She always had some instructive volume on the table beside her sofa, and she had

strength enough to hold the book for half an hour at a time. That was about the only strength she had now. The Neapolitan winters had been remarkably soft, but after the first month or two she had been obliged to give up her little walks in the garden. It lay beneath her window like a single enormous bouquet; as early as May, that year, the flowers were so dense. None of them, however, had a color so intense as the splendid blue of the bay, which filled up all the rest of the view. It would have looked painted, if you had not been able to see the little movement of the waves. Mildred Theory watched them by the hour, and the breathing crest of the volcano, on the other side of Naples, and the great sea-vision of Capri, on the horizon, changing its tint while her eyes rested there, and wondered what would become of her sister after she was gone. Now that Percival was married, — he was their only brother, and from one day to the other was to come down to Naples to show them his new wife, as yet a complete stranger, or revealed only in the few letters she had written them during her wedding tour, — now that Percival was to be quite taken up, poor Kate's situation would be much more grave. Mildred felt that she should be able to judge better, after she should have seen her sister-in-law, how much of a home Kate might expect to find with the pair; but even if Agnes should prove — well, more satisfactory than her letters, it was a wretched prospect for Kate, — this living as a mere appendage to happier people. Maiden aunts were very

well, but being a maiden aunt was only a last resource, and Kate's first resources had not even been tried.

Meanwhile the latter young lady wondered as well, — wondered in what book Mildred had read that Captain Benyon was in love with her. She admired him, she thought, but he did n't seem a man that would fall in love with one like that. She could see that he was on his guard; he would n't throw himself away. He thought too much of himself, or at any rate he took too good care of himself, — in the manner of a man to whom something had happened which had given him a lesson. Of course what had happened was that his heart was buried somewhere, — in some woman's grave; he had loved some beautiful girl, — much more beautiful, Kate was sure, than she, who thought herself small and dark, — and the maiden had died, and his capacity to love had died with her. He loved her memory, — that was the only thing he would care for now. He was quiet, gentle, clever, humorous, and very kind in his manner; but if any one save Mildred had said to her that if he came three times a week to Posilippo, it was for anything but to pass his time (he had told them he did n't know another soul in Naples), she would have felt that this was simply the kind of thing — usually so idiotic — that people always thought it necessary to say. It was very easy for him to come; he had the big ship's boat, with nothing else to do; and what could be more delightful than to be rowed across the bay, under a

bright awning, by four brown sailors with "Louisiana" in blue letters on their immaculate white shirts, and in gilt letters on their fluttering hat ribbons? The boat came to the steps of the garden of the *pension*, where the orange-trees hung over and made vague yellow balls shine back out of the water. Kate Theory knew all about that, for Captain Benyon had persuaded her to take a turn in the boat, and if they had only had another lady to go with them, he could have conveyed her to the ship, and shown her all over it. It looked beautiful, just a little way off, with the American flag hanging loose in the Italian air. They would have another lady when Agnes should arrive; then Percival would remain with Mildred while they took this excursion. Mildred had stayed alone the day she went in the boat; she had insisted on it, and, of course it was really Mildred who had persuaded her; though now that Kate came to think of it, Captain Benyon had, in his quiet, waiting way — he turned out to be waiting long after you thought he had let a thing pass — said a good deal about the pleasure it would give him. Of course, everything would give pleasure to a man who was so bored. He was keeping the "Louisiana" at Naples, week after week, simply because these were the commodore's orders. There was no work to be done there, and his time was on his hands; but of course the commodore, who had gone to Constantinople with the two other ships, had to be obeyed to the letter, however mysterious his motives. It made no difference that he was a

fantastic, grumbling, arbitrary old commodore; only a good while afterwards it occurred to Kate Theory that, for a reserved, correct man, Captain Benyon had given her a considerable proof of confidence, in speaking to her in these terms of his superior officer. If he looked at all hot when he arrived at the *pension*, she offered him a glass of cold "orangeade." Mildred thought this an unpleasant drink, — she called it messy; but Kate adored it, and Captain Benyon always accepted it.

The day I speak of, to change the subject, she called her sister's attention to the extraordinary sharpness of a zigzagging cloud-shadow on the tinted slope of Vesuvius; but Mildred only remarked in answer that she wished her sister would marry the captain. It was in this familiar way that constant meditation led Miss Theory to speak of him; it shows how constantly she thought of him, for, in general, no one was more ceremonious than she, and the failure of her health had not caused her to relax any form that it was possible to keep up. There was a kind of slim erectness, even in the way she lay on her sofa; and she always received the doctor as if he were calling for the first time.

"I had better wait till he asks me," Kate Theory said. "Dear Milly, if I were to do some of the things you wish me to do, I should shock you very much."

"I wish he would marry you, then. You know there is very little time, if I wish to see it."

"You will never see it, Mildred. I don't see why you should take so for granted that I would accept him."

"You will never meet a man who has so few disagreeable qualities. He is probably not enormously rich. I don't know what is the pay of a captain in the navy — "

"It 's a relief to find there is something you don't know," Kate Theory broke in.

"But when I am gone," her sister went on calmly, "when I am gone there will be plenty for both of you."

The younger sister, at this, was silent for a moment; then she exclaimed, "Mildred, you may be out of health, but I don't see why you should be dreadful!"

"You know that since we have been leading this life we have seen no one we liked better," said Milly. When she spoke of the life they were leading — there was always a soft resignation of regret and contempt in the allusion — she meant the southern winters, the foreign climates, the vain experiments, the lonely waitings, the wasted hours, the interminable rains, the bad food, the pottering, humbugging doctors, the damp *pensions*, the chance encounters, the fitful apparitions, of fellow-travellers.

"Why should n't you speak for yourself alone? I am glad *you* like him, Mildred."

"If you don't like him, why do you give him orangeade?"

At this inquiry Kate began to laugh, and her sister continued, —

"Of course you are glad I like him, my dear. If I did n't like him, and you did, it would n't be satisfactory at all. I can imagine nothing more miserable; I should n't die in any sort of comfort."

Kate Theory usually checked this sort of allusion — she was always too late — with a kiss; but on this occasion she added that it was a long time since Mildred had tormented her so much as she had done to-day. "You will make me hate him," she added.

"Well, that proves you don't already," Milly rejoined; and it happened that almost at this moment they saw, in the golden afternoon, Captain Benyon's boat approaching the steps at the end of the garden. He came that day, and he came two days later, and he came yet once again after an interval equally brief, before Percival Theory arrived, with Mrs. Percival, from Rome. He seemed anxious to crowd into these few days, as he would have said, a good deal of intercourse with the two remarkably nice girls — or nice women, he hardly knew which to call them — whom in the course of a long, idle, rather tedious detention at Naples, he had discovered in the lovely suburb of Posilippo. It was the American consul who had put him into relation with them; the sisters had had to sign, in the consul's presence, some law-papers, transmitted to them by the man of business who looked after their little property in America, and the kindly functionary, taking advan-

tage of the pretext (Captain Benyon happened to come into the consulate as he was starting, indulgently, to wait upon the ladies) to bring together "two parties" who, as he said, ought to appreciate each other, proposed to his fellow-officer in the service of the United States that he should go with him as witness of the little ceremony. He might, of course, take his clerk, but the captain would do much better; and he represented to Benyon that the Miss Theorys (singular name, wa' n't it?) suffered — he was sure — from a lack of society; also that one of them was very sick, that they were real pleasant and extraordinarily refined, and that the sight of a compatriot, literally draped, as it were, in the national banner, would cheer them up more than most anything, and give them a sense of protection. They had talked to the consul about Benyon's ship, which they could see from their windows, in the distance, at its anchorage. They were the only American ladies then at Naples, — the only residents, at least, — and the captain would n't be doing the polite thing unless he went to pay them his respects. Benyon felt afresh how little it was in his line to call upon strange women; he was not in the habit of hunting up female acquaintance, or of looking out for the soft emotions which the sex only can inspire. He had his reasons for this abstention, and he seldom relaxed it; but the consul appealed to him on rather strong grounds; and he suffered himself to be persuaded. He was far from regretting, during the first

weeks at least, an act which was distinctly inconsistent with his great rule, — that of never exposing himself to the chance of seriously caring for an unmarried woman. He had been obliged to make this rule, and had adhered to it with some success. He was fond of women, but he was forced to restrict himself to superficial sentiments. There was no use tumbling into situations from which the only possible issue was a retreat. The step he had taken with regard to poor Miss Theory and her delightful little sister was an exception on which at first he could only congratulate himself. That had been a happy idea of the ruminating old consul; it made Captain Benyon forgive him his hat, his boots, his shirt-front, — a costume which might be considered representative, and the effect of which was to make the observer turn with rapture to a half-naked lazzarone. On either side the acquaintance had helped the time to pass, and the hours he spent at the little *pension* at Posilippo left a sweet — and by no means innutritive — taste behind.

As the weeks went by his exception had grown to look a good deal like a rule; but he was able to remind himself that the path of retreat was always open to him. Moreover, if he should fall in love with the younger girl there would be no great harm, for Kate Theory was in love only with her sister, and it would matter very little to her whether he advanced or retreated. She was very attractive, or rather very attracting. Small, pale, attentive without rigidity,

full of pretty curves and quick movements, she looked as if the habit of watching and serving had taken complete possession of her, and was literally a little sister of charity. Her thick black hair was pushed behind her ears, as if to help her to listen, and her clear brown eyes had the smile of a person too full of tact to carry a dull face to a sick-bed. She spoke in an encouraging voice, and had soothing and unselfish habits. She was very pretty, — producing a cheerful effect of contrasted black and white, and dressed herself daintily, so that Mildred might have something agreeable to look at. Benyon very soon perceived that there was a fund of good service in her. Her sister had it all now; but poor Miss Theory was fading fast, and then what would become of this precious little force? The answer to such a question that seemed most to the point was that it was none of his business. He was not sick, — at least not physically, — and he was not looking out for a nurse. Such a companion might be a luxury, but was not, as yet, a necessity. The welcome of the two ladies, at first, had been simple, and he scarcely knew what to call it but sweet; a bright, gentle friendliness remained the tone of their greeting. They evidently liked him to come, — they liked to see his big transatlantic ship hover about those gleaming coasts of exile. The fact of Miss Mildred being always stretched on her couch — in his successive visits to foreign waters Benyon had not unlearned (as why should he?) the pleasant American habit of

using the lady's personal name — made their intimacy seem greater, their differences less; it was as if his hostesses had taken him into their confidence and he had been — as the consul would have said — of the same party. Knocking about the salt parts of the globe, with a few feet square on a rolling frigate for his only home, the pretty, flower-decked sitting-room of the quiet American sisters became, more than anything he had hitherto known, his interior. He had dreamed once of having an interior, but the dream had vanished in lurid smoke, and no such vision had come to him again. He had a feeling that the end of this was drawing nigh; he was sure that the advent of the strange brother, whose wife was certain to be disagreeable, would make a difference. That is why, as I have said, he came as often as possible the last week, after he had learned the day on which Percival Theory would arrive. The limits of the exception had been reached.

He had been new to the young ladies at Posilippo, and there was no reason why they should say to each other that he was a very different man from the ingenuous youth who, ten years before, used to wander with Georgina Gressie down vistas of plank fences brushed over with the advertisements of quack medicines. It was natural he should be, and we, who know him, would have found that he had traversed the whole scale of alteration. There was nothing ingenuous in him now; he had the look of experience, of having been seasoned and hardened by the years.

His face, his complexion, were the same; still smooth-shaven and slim, he always passed, at first, for a man scarcely out of his twenties. But his expression was old, and his talk was older still,—the talk of one who had seen much of the world (as indeed he had, to-day), and judged most things for himself, with a humorous scepticism which, whatever concessions it might make, superficially, for the sake of not offending (for instance) two remarkably nice American women, of the kind that had kept most of their illusions, left you with the conviction that the next minute it would go quickly back to its own stand-point. There was a curious contradiction in him; he struck you as serious, and yet he could not be said to take things seriously. This was what made Kate Theory feel so sure that he had lost the object of his affections; and she said to herself that it must have been under circumstances of peculiar sadness, for that was, after all, a frequent accident, and was not usually thought, in itself, a sufficient stroke to make a man a cynic. This reflection, it may be added, was, on the young lady's part, just the least bit acrimonious. Captain Benyon was not a cynic in any sense in which he might have shocked an innocent mind; he kept his cynicism to himself, and was a very clever, courteous, attentive gentleman. If he was melancholy, you knew it chiefly by his jokes, for they were usually at his own expense; and if he was indifferent, it was all the more to his credit that he should have exerted himself to entertain his countrywomen.

The last time he called before the arrival of the expected brother, he found Miss Theory alone, and sitting up, for a wonder, at her window. Kate had driven into Naples to give orders at the hotel for the reception of the travellers, who required accommodation more spacious than the villa at Posilippo (where the two sisters had the best rooms) could offer them; and the sick girl had taken advantage of her absence and of the pretext afforded by a day of delicious warmth, to transfer herself, for the first time in six months, to an arm-chair. She was practising, as she said, for the long carriage-journey to the north, where, in a quiet corner they knew of, on the Lago Maggiore, her summer was to be spent. Raymond Benyon remarked to her that she had evidently turned the corner and was going to get well, and this gave her a chance to say various things that were on her mind. She had many things on her mind, poor Mildred Theory, so caged and restless, and yet so resigned and patient as she was; with a clear, quick spirit, in the most perfect health, ever reaching forward, to the end of its tense little chain, from her wasted and suffering body; and, in the course of the perfect summer afternoon, as she sat there, exhilarated by the success of her effort to get up, and by her comfortable opportunity, she took her friendly visitor into the confidence of most of her anxieties. She told him, very promptly and positively, that she was not going to get well at all, that she had probably not more than ten months yet to live, and that he

would oblige her very much by not forcing her to waste any more breath in contradicting him on that point. Of course she could n't talk much; therefore, she wished to say to him only things that he would not hear from any one else. Such, for instance, was her present secret — Katie's and hers — the secret of their fearing so much that they should n't like Percival's wife, who was not from Boston, but from New York. Naturally, that by itself would be nothing, but from what they had heard of her set — this subject had been explored by their correspondents — they were rather nervous, nervous to the point of not being in the least reassured by the fact that the young lady would bring Percival a fortune. The fortune was a matter of course, for that was just what they had heard about Agnes's circle — that the stamp of money was on all their thoughts and doings. They were very rich and very new and very splashing, and evidently had very little in common with the two Miss Theorys, who, moreover, if the truth must be told (and this was a great secret), did not care much for the letters their sister-in-law had hitherto addressed them. She had been at a French boarding-school in New York, and yet (and this was the greatest secret of all) she wrote to them that she had performed a part of the journey through France in *diligance!*

Of course, they would see the next day; Miss Mildred was sure she should know in a moment whether Agnes would like them. She could never have told

him all this if her sister had been there, and Captain Benyon must promise never to reveal to Kate how she had chattered. Kate thought always that they must hide everything, and that even if Agnes should be a dreadful disappointment they must never let any one guess it. And yet Kate was just the one who would suffer, in the coming years, after she herself had gone. Their brother had been everything to them, but now it would all be different. Of course it was not to be expected that he should have remained a bachelor for their sake; she only wished he had waited till she was dead and Kate was married. One of these events, it was true, was much less sure than the other; Kate might never marry, — much as she wished she would! She was quite morbidly unselfish, and did n't think she had a right to have anything of her own — not even a husband. Miss Mildred talked a good while about Kate, and it never occurred to her that she might bore Captain Benyon. She did n't, in point of fact; he had none of the trouble of wondering why this poor, sick, worried lady was trying to push her sister down his throat. Their peculiar situation made everything natural, and the tone she took with him now seemed only what their pleasant relation for the last three months led up to. Moreover, he had an excellent reason for not being bored: the fact, namely, that, after all, with regard to her sister, Miss Mildred appeared to him to keep back more than she uttered. She did n't tell him the great thing, — she had noth-

ing to say as to what that charming girl thought of Raymond Benyon. The effect of their interview, indeed, was to make him shrink from knowing, and he felt that the right thing for him would be to get back into his boat, which was waiting at the garden steps, before Kate Theory should return from Naples. It came over him, as he sat there, that he was far too interested in knowing what this young lady thought of him. She might think what she pleased; it could make no difference to him. The best opinion in the world — if it looked out at him from her tender eyes — would not make him a whit more free or more happy. Women of that sort were not for him, women whom one could not see familiarly without falling in love with them, and whom it was no use to fall in love with unless one was ready to marry them. The light of the summer afternoon, and of Miss Mildred's pure spirit, seemed suddenly to flood the whole subject. He saw that he was in danger, and he had long since made up his mind that from this particular peril it was not only necessary but honorable to flee. He took leave of his hostess before her sister reappeared, and had the courage even to say to her that he would not come back often after that; they would be so much occupied by their brother and his wife! As he moved across the glassy bay, to the rhythm of the oars, he wished either that the sisters would leave Naples or that his confounded commodore would send for him.

When Kate returned from her errand, ten minutes

later, Milly told her of the captain's visit, and added that she had never seen anything so sudden as the way he left her. "He would n't wait for you, my dear, and he said he thought it more than likely that he should never see us again. It is as if he thought you were going to die too!"

"Is his ship called away?" Kate Theory asked.

"He did n't tell me so; he said we should be so busy with Percival and Agnes."

"He has got tired of us, — that 's all. There 's nothing wonderful in that; I knew he would."

Mildred said nothing for a moment; she was watching her sister, who was very attentively arranging some flowers. "Yes, of course, we are very dull, and he is like everybody else."

"I thought you thought he was so wonderful," said Kate, "and so fond of us."

"So he is; I am surer of that than ever. That 's why he went away so abruptly."

Kate looked at her sister now. "I don't understand."

"Neither do I, darling. But you will, one of these days."

"How if he never comes back?"

"Oh, he will — after a while — when I am gone. Then he will explain; that, at least, is clear to me."

"My poor precious, as if I cared!" Kate Theory exclaimed, smiling as she distributed her flowers. She carried them to the window, to place them near her sister, and here she paused a moment, her eye

caught by an object, far out in the bay, with which she was not unfamiliar. Mildred noticed its momentary look, and followed its direction.

"It's the captain's gig going back to the ship," Milly said. "It's so still one can almost hear the oars."

Kate Theory turned away, with a sudden, strange violence, a movement and exclamation which, the very next minute, as she became conscious of what she had said, — and, still more, of what she felt, — smote her own heart (as it flushed her face) with surprise, and with the force of a revelation: "I wish it would sink him to the bottom of the sea!"

Her sister stared, then caught her by the dress, as she passed from her, drawing her back with a weak hand. "Oh, my dearest, my poorest!" And she pulled Kate down and down toward her, so that the girl had nothing for it but to sink on her knees and bury her face in Mildred's lap. If that ingenious invalid did not know everything now, she knew a great deal.

# PART III.

## V.

MRS. PERCIVAL proved very pretty. It is more gracious to begin with this declaration, instead of saying that, in the first place, she proved very silly. It took a long day to arrive at the end of her silliness, and the two ladies at Posilippo, even after a week had passed, suspected that they had only skirted its edges. Kate Theory had not spent half an hour in her company before she gave a little private sigh of relief; she felt that a situation which had promised to be embarrassing was now quite clear, was even of a primitive simplicity. She would spend with her sister-in-law, in the coming time, one week in the year; that was all that was mortally possible. It was a blessing that one could see exactly what she was, for in that way the question settled itself. It would have been much more tiresome if Agnes had been a little less obvious; then she would have had to hesitate and consider and weigh one thing against another. She was pretty and silly, as distinctly as an orange is yellow and round; and Kate Theory would as soon have thought of looking to her to give interest to the future as she would have thought of

looking to an orange to impart solidity to the prospect of dinner. Mrs. Percival travelled in the hope of meeting her American acquaintance, or of making acquaintance with such Americans as she did meet, and for the purpose of buying mementos for her relations. She was perpetually adding to her store of articles in tortoise-shell, in mother-of-pearl, in olive-wood, in ivory, in filigree, in tartan lacquer, in mosaic; and she had a collection of Roman scarfs and Venetian beads, which she looked over exhaustively every night before she went to bed. Her conversation bore mainly upon the manner in which she intended to dispose of these accumulations. She was constantly changing about, among each other, the persons to whom they were respectively to be offered. At Rome one of the first things she said to her husband after entering the Coliseum had been: "I guess I will give the ivory work-box to Bessie and the Roman pearls to Aunt Harriet!" She was always hanging over the travellers' book at the hotel; she had it brought up to her, with a cup of chocolate, as soon as she arrived. She searched its pages for the magical name of New York, and she indulged in infinite conjecture as to who the people were — the name was sometimes only a partial cue — who had inscribed it there. What she most missed in Europe, and what she most enjoyed, were the New Yorkers; when she met them she talked about the people in their native city who had "moved" and the streets they had moved to. "Oh, yes, the Drapers are going

up town, to Twenty-fourth Street, and the Vanderdeckens are going to be in Twenty-third Street, right back of them. My uncle, Henry Platt, thinks of building round there." Mrs. Percival Theory was capable of repeating statements like these thirty times over, — of lingering on them for hours. She talked largely of herself, of her uncles and aunts, of her clothes — past, present, and future. These articles, in especial, filled her horizon; she considered them with a complacency which might have led you to suppose that she had invented the custom of draping the human form. Her main point of contact with Naples was the purchase of coral; and all the while she was there the word "set" — she used it as if every one would understand — fell with its little, flat, common sound upon the ears of her sisters-in-law, who had no sets of anything. She cared little for pictures and mountains; Alps and Apennines were not productive of New Yorkers, and it was difficult to take an interest in Madonnas who flourished at periods when, apparently, there were no fashions, or, at any rate, no trimmings.

I speak here not only of the impression she made upon her husband's anxious sisters, but of the judgment passed on her (he went so far as that, though it was not obvious how it mattered to him) by Raymond Benyon. And this brings me at a jump (I confess it 's a very small one) to the fact that he did, after all, go back to Posilippo. He stayed away for nine days, and at the end of this time Percival

Theory called upon him, to thank him for the civility he had shown his kinswomen. He went to this gentleman's hotel, to return his visit, and there he found Miss Kate, in her brother's sitting-room. She had come in by appointment from the villa, and was going with the others to seek the royal palace, which she had not yet had an opportunity to inspect. It was proposed (not by Kate), and presently arranged, that Captain Benyon should go with them, and he accordingly walked over marble floors for half an hour, exchanging conscious commonplaces with the woman he loved. For this truth had rounded itself during those nine days of absence; he discovered that there was nothing particularly sweet in his life when once Kate Theory had been excluded from it. He had stayed away to keep himself from falling in love with her; but this expedient was in itself illuminating, for he perceived that, according to the vulgar adage, he was locking the stable door after the horse had been stolen. As he paced the deck of his ship and looked toward Posilippo, his tenderness crystallized; the thick, smoky flame of a sentiment that knew itself forbidden and was angry at the knowledge, now danced upon the fuel of his good resolutions. The latter, it must be said, resisted, declined to be consumed. He determined that he would see Kate Theory again, for a time, just sufficient to bid her good-by, and to add a little explanation. He thought of his explanation very lovingly, but it may not strike the reader as a happy inspira-

tion. To part from her dryly, abruptly, without an allusion to what he might have said if everything had been different, — that would be wisdom, of course, that would be virtue, that would be the line of a practical man, of a man who kept himself well in hand. But it would be virtue terribly unrewarded, — it would be virtue too austere for a person who sometimes flattered himself that he had taught himself stoicism. The minor luxury tempted him irresistibly, since the larger — that of happy love — was denied him; the luxury of letting the girl know that it would not be an accident — oh, not at all — that they should never meet again. She might easily think it was, and thinking it was would doubtless do her no harm. But this would n't give him his pleasure, — the Platonic satisfaction of expressing to her at the same time his belief that they might have made each other happy, and the necessity of his renunciation. That, probably, would n't hurt her either, for she had given him no proof whatever that she cared for him. The nearest approach to it was the way she walked beside him now, sweet and silent, without the least reference to his not having been back to the villa. The place was cool and dusky, the blinds were drawn, to keep out the light and noise, and the little party wandered through the high saloons, where precious marbles and the gleam of gilding and satin made reflections in the rich dimness. Here and there the cicerone, in slippers, with Neapolitan familiarity, threw open a shutter to

show off a picture on a tapestry. He strolled in front with Percival Theory and his wife, while this lady, drooping silently from her husband's arm as they passed, felt the stuff of the curtains and the sofas. When he caught her in these experiments, the cicerone, in expressive deprecation, clasped his hands and lifted his eyebrows; whereupon Mrs. Theory exclaimed to her husband, "Oh, bother his old king!" It was not striking to Captain Benyon why Percival Theory had married the niece of Mr. Henry Platt. He was less interesting than his sisters, — a smooth, cool, correct young man, who frequently took out a pencil and did a little arithmetic on the back of a letter. He sometimes, in spite of his correctness, chewed a toothpick, and he missed the American papers, which he used to ask for in the most unlikely places. He was a Bostonian converted to New York; a very special type.

"Is it settled when you leave Naples?" Benyon asked of Kate Theory.

"I think so; on the twenty-fourth. My brother has been very kind; he has lent us his carriage, which is a large one, so that Mildred can lie down. He and Agnes will take another; but, of course, we shall travel together."

"I wish to Heaven I were going with you!" Captain Benyon said. He had given her the opportunity to respond, but she did not take it; she merely remarked, with a vague laugh, that of course he could n't take his ship over the Apennines. "Yes,

there is always my ship," he went on. "I am afraid that in future it will carry me far away from you."

They were alone in one of the royal apartments; their companions had passed, in advance of them, into the adjoining room. Benyon and his fellow-visitor had paused beneath one of the immense chandeliers of glass, which in the clear, colored gloom (through it one felt the strong outer light of Italy beating in) suspended its twinkling drops from the decorated vault. They looked round them confusedly, made shy for the moment by Benyon's having struck a note more serious than any that had hitherto sounded between them, looked at the sparse furniture, draped in white overalls, at the scagliola floor, in which the great cluster of crystal pendants seemed to shine again.

"You are master of your ship. Can't you sail it as you like?" Kate Theory asked, with a smile.

"I am not master of anything. There is not a man in the world less free. I am a slave. I am a victim."

She looked at him with kind eyes; something in his voice suddenly made her put away all thought of the defensive airs that a girl, in certain situations, is expected to assume. She perceived that he wanted to make her understand something, and now her only wish was to help him to say it. "You are not happy," she murmured, simply, her voice dying away in a kind of wonderment at this reality.

The gentle touch of the words — it was as if her hand had stroked his cheek — seemed to him the sweetest thing he had ever known. "No, I am not happy, because I am not free. If I were — if I were, I would give up my ship. I would give up everything, to follow you. I can't explain; that is part of the hardness of it. I only want you to know it, — that if certain things were different, if everything was different, I might tell you that I believe I should have a right to speak to you. Perhaps some day it will change; but probably then it will be too late. Meanwhile, I have no right of any kind. I don't want to trouble you, and I don't ask of you — anything! It is only to have spoken just once. I don't make you understand, of course. I am afraid I seem to you rather a brute, — perhaps even a humbug. Don't think of it now, — don't try to understand. But some day, in the future, remember what I have said to you, and how we stood here, in this strange old place, alone! Perhaps it will give you a little pleasure."

Kate Theory began by listening to him with visible eagerness; but in a moment she turned away her eyes. "I am very sorry for you," she said, gravely.

"Then you do understand enough?"

"I shall think of what you have said, in the future."

Benyon's lips formed the beginning of a word of tenderness, which he instantly suppressed; and in a different tone, with a bitter smile and a sad shake

of the head, raising his arms a moment and letting them fall, he said: "It won't hurt any one, your remembering this!"

"I don't know whom you mean." And the girl, abruptly, began to walk to the end of the room. He made no attempt to tell her whom he meant, and they proceeded together in silence till they overtook their companions.

There were several pictures in the neighboring room, and Percival Theory and his wife had stopped to look at one of them, of which the cicerone announced the title and the authorship as Benyon came up. It was a modern portrait of a Bourbon princess, a woman young, fair, handsome, covered with jewels. Mrs. Percival appeared to be more struck with it than with anything the palace had yet offered to her sight, while her sister-in-law walked to the window, which the custodian had opened, to look out into the garden. Benyon noticed this; he was conscious that he had given the girl something to reflect upon, and his ears burned a little as he stood beside Mrs. Percival and looked up, mechanically, at the royal lady. He already repented a little of what he had said, for, after all, what was the use? And he hoped the others would n't observe that he had been making love.

"Gracious, Percival! Do you see who she looks like?" Mrs. Theory said to her husband.

"She looks like a woman who has run up a big bill at Tiffany's," this gentleman answered.

"She looks like my sister-in-law; the eyes, the mouth, the way the hair's done, — the whole thing."

"Which do you mean? You have got about a dozen."

"Why, Georgina, of course, — Georgina Roy. She's awfully like."

"Do you call *her* your sister-in-law?" Percival Theory asked. "You must want very much to claim her."

"Well, she's handsome enough. You have got to invent some new name, then. Captain Benyon, what do you call your brother-in-law's second wife?" Mrs. Percival continued, turning to her neighbor, who still stood staring at the portrait. At first he had looked without seeing; then sight, and hearing as well, became quick. They were suddenly peopled with thrilling recognitions. The Bourbon princess — the eyes, the mouth, the way the hair was done; these things took on an identity, and the gaze of the painted face seemed to fasten itself to his own. But who in the world was Georgina Roy, and what was this talk about sisters-in-law? He turned to the little lady at his side a countenance unexpectedly puzzled by the problem she had airily presented to him.

"Your brother-in-law's second wife? That's rather complicated."

"Well, of course, he need n't have married again!" said Mrs. Percival, with a small sigh.

"Whom did he marry?" asked Benyon, staring.

Percival Theory had turned away. "Oh, if you are going into her relationships!" he murmured, and joined his sister at the brilliant window, through which, from the distance, the many-voiced uproar of Naples came in.

"He married first my sister Dora, and she died five years ago. Then he married *her*," and Mrs. Percival nodded at the princess.

Benyon's eyes went back to the portrait; he could see what she meant — it stared out at him. "Her? Georgina?"

"Georgina Gressie. Gracious, do you know her?"

It was very distinct — that answer of Mrs. Percival's, and the question that followed it as well. But he had the resource of the picture; he could look at it, seem to take it very seriously, though it danced up and down before him. He felt that he was turning red, then he felt that he was turning pale. "The brazen impudence!" That was the way he could speak to himself now of the woman he had once loved, and whom he afterwards hated, till this had died out, too. Then the wonder of it was lost in the quickly growing sense that it would make a difference for him, — a great difference. Exactly what, he did n't see yet; only a difference that swelled and swelled as he thought of it, and caught up, in its expansion, the girl who stood behind him so quietly, looking into the Italian garden.

The custodian drew Mrs. Percival away to show her another princess, before Benyon answered her

last inquiry. This gave him time to recover from his first impulse, which had been to answer it with a negative; he saw in a moment that an admission of his acquaintance with Mrs. Roy (Mrs. Roy! — it was prodigious!) was necessarily helping him to learn more. Besides, it need n't be compromising. Very likely Mrs. Percival would hear one day that he had once wanted to marry her. So, when he joined his companions a minute later he remarked that he had known Miss Gressie years before, and had even admired her considerably, but had lost sight of her entirely in later days. She had been a great beauty, and it was a wonder that she had not married earlier. Five years ago, was it? No, it was only two. He had been going to say that in so long a time it would have been singular he should not have heard of it. He had been away from New York for ages; but one always heard of marriages and deaths. This was a proof, though two years was rather long. He led Mrs. Percival insidiously into a further room, in advance of the others, to whom the cicerone returned. She was delighted to talk about her "connections," and she supplied him with every detail. He could trust himself now; his self-possession was complete, or, so far as it was wanting, the fault was that of a sudden gayety which he could not, on the spot, have accounted for. Of course it was not very flattering to them — Mrs. Percival's own people — that poor Dora's husband should have consoled himself; but men always did it (talk of widows!) and he

had chosen a girl who was — well, very fine-looking, and the sort of successor to Dora that they need n't be ashamed of. She had been awfully admired, and no one had understood why she had waited so long to marry. She had had some affair as a girl, — an engagement to an officer in the army, — and the man had jilted her, or they had quarrelled, or something or other. She was almost an old maid, — well, she was thirty, or very nearly, — but she had done something good now. She was handsomer than ever, and tremendously stylish. William Roy had one of the biggest incomes in the city, and he was quite affectionate. He had been intensely fond of Dora — he often spoke of her still, at least to her own relations; and her portrait, the last time Mrs. Percival was in his house (it was at a party, after his marriage to Miss Gressie), was still in the front parlor. Perhaps by this time he had had it moved to the back; but she was sure he would keep it somewhere, anyway. Poor Dora had had no children; but Georgina was making that all right, — she had a beautiful boy. Mrs. Percival had what she would have called quite a pleasant chat with Captain Benyon about Mrs. Roy. Perhaps *he* was the officer — she never thought of that! He was sure he had never jilted her? And he had never quarrelled with a lady? Well, he must be different from most men.

He certainly had the air of being so, before he parted that afternoon with Kate Theory. This young lady, at least, was free to think him wanting in that

consistency which is supposed to be a distinctively masculine virtue. An hour before, he had taken an eternal farewell of her, and now he was alluding to future meetings, to future visits, proposing that, with her sister-in-law, she should appoint an early day for coming to see the "Louisiana." She had supposed she understood him, but it would appear now that she had not understood him at all. His manner had changed, too. More and more off his guard, Raymond Benyon was not aware how much more hopeful an expression it gave him, his irresistible sense that somehow or other this extraordinary proceeding of his wife's would set him free. Kate Theory felt rather weary and mystified, — all the more for knowing that henceforth Captain Benyon's variations would be the most important thing in life for her.

This officer, on his ship in the bay, lingered very late on deck that night, — lingered there, indeed, under the warm southern sky, in which the stars glittered with a hot, red light, until the early dawn began to show. He smoked cigar after cigar, he walked up and down by the hour, he was agitated by a thousand reflections, he repeated to himself that it made a difference, — an immense difference; but the pink light had deepened in the east before he had discovered in what the diversity consisted. By that time he saw it clearly, — it consisted in Georgina's being in his power now, in place of his being in hers. He laughed as he sat there alone in the darkness at the thought of what she had done. It had occurred

to him more than once that she would do it, — he believed her capable of anything; but the accomplished fact had a freshness of comicality. He thought of Mr. William Roy, of his big income, of his being "quite affectionate," of his blooming son and heir, of his having found such a worthy successor to poor Mrs. Dora. He wondered whether Georgina had happened to mention to him that she had a husband living, but was strongly of the belief that she had not. Why should she, after all? She had neglected to mention it to so many others. He had thought he knew her, in so many years, — that he had nothing more to learn about her; but this ripe stroke revived his sense of her audacity. Of course it was what she had been waiting for, and if she had not done it sooner it was because she had hoped he would be lost at sea in one of his long cruises and relieve her of the necessity of a crime. How she must hate him to-day for not having been lost, for being alive, for continuing to put her in the wrong! Much as she hated him, however, his own loathing was at least a match for hers. She had done him the foulest of wrongs, — she had ravaged his life. That he should ever detest in this degree a woman whom he had once loved as he loved her, he would not have thought possible in his innocent younger years. But he would not have thought it possible then that a woman should be such a cold-blooded devil as she had been. His love had perished in his rage, — his blinding, impotent rage at finding that he had been duped, and

measuring his impotence. When he learned, years before, from Mrs. Portico, what she had done with her baby, of whose entrance into life she herself had given him no intimation, he felt that he was face to face with a full revelation of her nature. Before that it had puzzled him; it had amazed him; his relations with her were bewildering, stupefying. But when, after obtaining, with difficulty and delay, a leave of absence from Government, and betaking himself to Italy to look for the child and assume possession of it, he had encountered absolute failure and defeat, — then the case presented itself to him more simply. He perceived that he had mated himself with a creature who just happened to be a monster, a human exception altogether. That was what he could n't pardon — her conduct about the child; never, never, never! To him she might have done what she chose, — dropped him, pushed him out into eternal cold, with his hands fast tied, — and he would have accepted it, excused her almost, admitted that it had been his business to mind better what he was about. But she had tortured him through the poor little irrecoverable son whom he had never seen, through the heart and the vitals that she had not herself, and that he had to have, poor wretch, for both of them!

All his efforts for years had been to forget these horrible months, and he had cut himself off from them so that they seemed at times to belong to the life of another person. But to-night he lived them

over again; he retraced the different gradations of darkness through which he had passed, from the moment, so soon after his extraordinary marriage, when it came over him that she already repented, and meant, if possible, to elude all her obligations. This was the moment when he saw why she had reserved herself — in the strange vow she extracted from him — an open door for retreat; the moment, too, when her having had such an inspiration (in the midst of her momentary good faith, if good faith it had ever been) struck him as a proof of her essential depravity. What he had tried to forget came back to him: the child that was not his child produced for him when he fell upon that squalid nest of peasants in the Genoese country; and then the confessions, retractations, contradictions, lies, terrors, threats, and general bottomless, baffling baseness of every one in the place. The child was gone; that had been the only definite thing. The woman who had taken it to nurse had a dozen different stories, — her husband had as many, — and every one in the village had a hundred more. Georgina had been sending money, — she had managed, apparently, to send a good deal, — and the whole country seemed to have been living on it and making merry. At one moment the baby had died and received a most expensive burial; at another he had been intrusted (for more healthy air, Santissima Madonna!) to the woman's cousin in another village. According to a version, which for a day or two Benyon had inclined to

think the least false, he had been taken by the cousin (for his beauty's sake) to Genoa (when she went for the first time in her life to the town to see her daughter in service there), and had been confided for a few hours to a third woman, who was to keep him while the cousin walked about the streets, but who, having no child of her own, took such a fancy to him that she refused to give him up, and a few days later left the place (she was a Pisana) never to be heard of more. The cousin had forgotten her name, — it had happened six months before. Benyon spent a year looking up and down Italy for his child, and inspecting hundreds of swaddled infants, impenetrable candidates for recognition. Of course he could only get further and further from real knowledge, and his search was arrested by the conviction that it was making him mad. He set his teeth and made up his mind (or tried to) that the baby had died in the hands of its nurse. This was, after all, much the likeliest supposition, and the woman had maintained it, in the hope of being rewarded for her candor, quite as often as she had asseverated that it was still, somewhere, alive, in the hope of being remunerated for her good news. It may be imagined with what sentiments toward his wife Benyon had emerged from this episode. To-night his memory went further back, — back to the beginning and to the days when he had had to ask himself, with all the crudity of his first surprise, what in the name of wantonness she had wished to do with him. The answer to this speculation was so

old, — it had dropped so out of the line of recurrence, — that it was now almost new again. Moreover, it was only approximate, for, as I have already said, he could comprehend such conduct as little at the end as at the beginning. She had found herself on a slope which her nature forced her to descend to the bottom. She did him the honor of wishing to enjoy his society, and she did herself the honor of thinking that their intimacy — however brief — must have a certain consecration. She felt that, with him, after his promise (he would have made any promise to lead her on), she was secure, — secure as she had proved to be, secure as she must think herself now. That security had helped her to ask herself, after the first flush of passion was over, and her native, her twice-inherited worldliness had had time to open its eyes again, why she should keep faith with a man whose deficiencies (as a husband before the world — another affair) had been so scientifically exposed to her by her parents. So she had simply determined *not* to keep faith; and her determination, at least, she did keep.

By the time Benyon turned in he had satisfied himself, as I say, that Georgina was now in his power; and this seemed to him such an improvement in his situation that he allowed himself (for the next ten days) a license which made Kate Theory almost as happy as it made her sister, though she pretended to understand it far less. Mildred sank to her rest, or rose to fuller comprehensions, within the year, in the Isle of Wight, and Captain Benyon, who had never

written so many letters as since they left Naples, sailed westward about the same time as the sweet survivor. For the "Louisiana" at last was ordered home.

## VI.

CERTAINLY, I will see you if you come, and you may appoint any day or hour you like. I should have seen you with pleasure any time these last years. Why should we not be friends, as we used to be? Perhaps we shall be yet. I say "perhaps" only, on purpose, — because your note is rather vague about your state of mind. Don't come with any idea about making me nervous or uncomfortable. I am not nervous by nature, thank Heaven, and I won't — I positively won't (do you hear, dear Captain Benyon?) — be uncomfortable. I have been so (it served me right) for years and years; but I am very happy now. To remain so is the very definite intention of, yours ever,

GEORGINA ROY.

This was the answer Benyon received to a short letter that he despatched to Mrs. Roy after his return to America. It was not till he had been there some weeks that he wrote to her. He had been occupied in various ways: he had had to look after his ship; he had had to report at Washington; he had spent a fortnight with his mother at Portsmouth, N. H.; and he had paid a visit to Kate Theory in Boston. She herself was paying visits, she was staying with various relatives and friends. She had more color — it was very delicately rosy — than she had had of old,

in spite of her black dress; and the effect of looking at him seemed to him to make her eyes grow still prettier. Though sisterless now, she was not without duties, and Benyon could easily see that life would press hard on her unless some one should interfere. Every one regarded her as just the person to do certain things. Every one thought she could do everything, because she had nothing else to do. She used to read to the blind, and, more onerously, to the deaf. She looked after other people's children while the parents attended anti-slavery conventions.

She was coming to New York later to spend a week at her brother's, but beyond this she did n't know what she should do. Benyon felt it to be awkward that he should not be able, just now, to tell her; and this had much to do with his coming to the point, for he accused himself of having rather hung fire. Coming to the point, for Benyon, meant writing a note to Mrs. Roy (as he must call her), in which he asked whether she would see him if he should present himself. The missive was short; it contained, in addition to what I have noted, little more than the remark that he had something of importance to say to her. Her reply, which we have just read, was prompt. Benyon designated an hour, and the next day rang the door-bell of her big modern house, whose polished windows seemed to shine defiance at him.

As he stood on the steps, looking up and down the straight vista of the Fifth Avenue, he perceived that he was trembling a little, that *he* was nervous, if she

was not. He was ashamed of his agitation, and he addressed himself a very stern reprimand. Afterwards he saw that what had made him nervous was not any doubt of the goodness of his cause, but his revived sense (as he drew near her) of his wife's hardness,—her capacity for insolence. He might only break himself against that, and the prospect made him feel helpless. She kept him waiting for a long time after he had been introduced; and as he walked up and down her drawing-room, an immense, florid, expensive apartment, covered with blue satin, gilding, mirrors, and bad frescos, it came over him as a certainty that her delay was calculated. She wished to annoy him, to weary him; she was as ungenerous as she was unscrupulous. It never occurred to him that in spite of the bold words of her note, she, too, might be in a tremor, and if any one in their secret had suggested that she was afraid to meet him, he would have laughed at this idea. This was of bad omen for the success of his errand; for it showed that he recognized the ground of her presumption,—his having the superstition of old promises. By the time she appeared, he was flushed,—very angry. She closed the door behind her, and stood there looking at him, with the width of the room between them.

The first emotion her presence excited was a quick sense of the strange fact that, after all these years of loneliness, such a magnificent person should be his wife. For she was magnificent, in the maturity of her beauty, her head erect, her complexion splendid,

her auburn tresses undimmed, a certain plenitude in her very glance. He saw in a moment that she wished to seem to him beautiful, she had endeavored to dress herself to the best effect. Perhaps, after all, it was only for this she had delayed; she wished to give herself every possible touch. For some moments they said nothing; they had not stood face to face for nearly ten years, and they met now as adversaries. No two persons could possibly be more interested in taking each other's measure. It scarcely belonged to Georgina, however, to have too much the air of timidity; and after a moment, satisfied, apparently, that she was not to receive a broadside, she advanced, slowly rubbing her jewelled hands and smiling. He wondered why she should smile, what thought was in her mind. His impressions followed each other with extraordinary quickness of pulse, and now he saw, in addition to what he had already perceived, that she was waiting to take her cue, — she had determined on no definite line. There was nothing definite about her but her courage; the rest would depend upon him. As for her courage, it seemed to glow in the beauty which grew greater as she came nearer, with her eyes on his and her fixed smile; to be expressed in the very perfume that accompanied her steps. By this time he had got still a further impression, and it was the strangest of all. She was ready for anything, she was capable of anything, she wished to surprise him with her beauty, to remind him that it belonged, after all, at the bottom of everything, to him. She

was ready to bribe him, if bribing should be necessary. She had carried on an intrigue before she was twenty; it would be more, rather than less, easy for her, now that she was thirty. All this and more was in her cold, living eyes, as in the prolonged silence they engaged themselves with his; but I must not dwell upon it, for reasons extraneous to the remarkable fact. She was a truly amazing creature.

"Raymond!" she said, in a low voice, a voice which might represent either a vague greeting or an appeal.

He took no heed of the exclamation, but asked her why she had deliberately kept him waiting, — as if she had not made a fool enough of him already. She could n't suppose it was for his pleasure he had come into the house.

She hesitated a moment, — still with her smile. "I must tell you I have a son, — the dearest little boy. His nurse happened to be engaged for the moment, and I had to watch him. I am more devoted to him than you might suppose."

He fell back from her a few steps. "I wonder if you are insane," he murmured.

"To allude to my child? Why do you ask me such questions then? I tell you the simple truth. I take every care of this one. I am older and wiser. The other one was a complete mistake; he had no right to exist."

"Why did n't you kill him then with your own hands, instead of that torture?"

"Why did n't I kill myself? That question would

be more to the point. You are looking wonderfully well," she broke off in another tone; "had n't we better sit down?"

"I did n't come here for the advantage of conversation," Benyon answered. And he was going on, but she interrupted him —

"You came to say something dreadful, very likely; though I hoped you would see it was better not. But just tell me this before you begin. Are you successful, are you happy? It has been so provoking, not knowing more about you."

There was something in the manner in which this was said that caused him to break into a loud laugh; whereupon she added, —

"Your laugh is just what it used to be. How it comes back to me! You *have* improved in appearance," she went on.

She had seated herself, though he remained standing; and she leaned back in a low, deep chair, looking up at him, with her arms folded. He stood near her and over her, as it were, dropping his baffled eyes on her, with his hand resting on the corner of the chimney-piece. "Has it never occurred to you that I may deem myself absolved from the promise made you before I married you?"

"Very often, of course. But I have instantly dismissed the idea. How can you be 'absolved'? One promises, or one does n't. I attach no meaning to that, and neither do you." And she glanced down to the front of her dress.

Benyon listened, but he went on as if he had not heard her. "What I came to say to you is this: that I should like your consent to my bringing a suit for divorce against you."

"A suit for divorce? I never thought of that."

"So that I may marry another woman. I can easily obtain a divorce on the ground of your desertion."

She stared a moment, then her smile solidified, as it were, and she looked grave; but he could see that her gravity, with her lifted eyebrows, was partly assumed. "Ah, you want to marry another woman!" she exclaimed, slowly, thoughtfully. He said nothing, and she went on: "Why don't you do as I have done?"

"Because I don't want my children to be —"

Before he could say the words she sprang up, checking him with a cry. "Don't say it; it is n't necessary! Of course I know what you mean; but they won't be if no one knows it."

"I should object to knowing it myself; it 's enough for me to know it of yours."

"Of course I have been prepared for your saying that."

"I should hope so!" Benyon exclaimed. "You may be a bigamist if it suits you, but to me the idea is not attractive. I wish to marry —" and, hesitating a moment, with his slight stammer, he repeated, "I wish to marry —"

"Marry, then, and have done with it!" cried Mrs. Roy.

He could already see that he should be able to extract no consent from her; he felt rather sick. "It's extraordinary to me that you should n't be more afraid of being found out," he said after a moment's reflection. "There are two or three possible accidents."

"How do you know how much afraid I am? I have thought of every accident, in dreadful nights. How do you know what my life is, or what it has been all these miserable years?"

"You look wasted and worn, certainly."

"Ah, don't compliment me!" Georgina exclaimed. "If I had never known you — if I had not been through all this — I believe I should have been handsome. When did you hear of my marriage? Where were you at the time?"

"At Naples, more than six months ago, by a mere chance."

"How strange that it should have taken you so long! Is the lady a Neapolitan? They don't mind what they do over there."

"I have no information to give you beyond what I just said," Benyon rejoined. "My life does n't in the least regard you."

"Ah, but it does from the moment I refuse to let you divorce me."

"You refuse?" Benyon said softly.

"Don't look at me that way! You have n't advanced so rapidly as I used to think you would; you have n't distinguished yourself so much," she went on, irrelevantly.

"I shall be promoted commodore one of these days," Benyon answered. "You don't know much about it, for my advancement has already been very exceptionally rapid." He blushed as soon as the words were out of his mouth. She gave a light laugh on seeing it; but he took up his hat and added: "Think over a day or two what I have proposed to you. Think of the temper in which I ask it."

"The temper?" she stared. "Pray, what have you to do with temper?" And as he made no reply, smoothing his hat with his glove, she went on: "Years ago, as much as you please! you had a good right, I don't deny, and you raved, in your letters, to your heart's content. That's why I would n't see you; I did n't wish to take it full in the face. But that's all over now, time is a healer, you have cooled off, and by your own admission you have consoled yourself. Why do you talk to me about temper? What in the world have I done to you, but let you alone?"

"What do you call this business?" Benyon asked, with his eye flashing all over the room.

"Ah, excuse me, that does n't touch you, — it's my affair. I leave you your liberty, and I can live as I like. If I choose to live in this way, it may be queer (I admit it is, awfully), but you have nothing to say to it. If I am willing to take the risk, you may be. If I am willing to play such an infernal trick upon a confiding gentleman (I will put it as strongly as you

possibly could), I don't see what you have to say to it except that you are tremendously glad such a woman as that is n't known to be your wife!" She had been cool and deliberate up to this time; but with these words her latent agitation broke out. "Do you think I have been happy? Do you think I have enjoyed existence? Do you see me freezing up into a stark old maid?"

"I wonder you stood out so long!" said Benyon.

"I wonder I did. They were bad years."

"I have no doubt they were!"

"You could do as you pleased," Georgina went on. "You roamed about the world; you formed charming relations. I am delighted to hear it from your own lips. Think of my going back to my father's house — that family vault — and living there, year after year, as Miss Gressie! If you remember my father and mother — they are round in Twelfth Street, just the same — you must admit that I paid for my folly!"

"I have never understood you; I don't understand you now," said Benyon.

She looked at him a moment. "I adored you."

"I could damn you with a word!" he went on.

The moment he had spoken she grasped his arm and held up her other hand, as if she were listening to a sound outside the room. She had evidently had an inspiration, and she carried it into instant effect. She swept away to the door, flung it open, and passed into the hall, whence her voice came back to Benyon as she addressed a person who was apparently her

husband. She had heard him enter the house at his habitual hour, after his long morning at business; the closing of the door of the vestibule had struck her ear. The parlor was on a level with the hall, and she greeted him without impediment. She asked him to come in and be introduced to Captain Benyon, and he responded with due solemnity. She returned in advance of him, her eyes fixed upon Benyon and lighted with defiance, her whole face saying to him, vividly: "Here is your opportunity; I give it to you with my own hands. Break your promise and betray me if you dare! You say you can damn me with a word: speak the word and let us see!"

Benyon's heart beat faster, as he felt that it was indeed a chance; but half his emotion came from the spectacle — magnificent in its way — of her unparalleled impudence. A sense of all that he had escaped in not having had to live with her rolled over him like a wave, while he looked strangely at Mr. Roy, to whom this privilege had been vouchsafed. He saw in a moment his successor had a constitution that would carry it. Mr. Roy suggested squareness and solidity; he was a broad-based, comfortable, polished man, with a surface in which the rank tendrils of irritation would not easily obtain a foothold. He had a broad, blank face, a capacious mouth, and a small, light eye, to which, as he entered, he was engaged in adjusting a double gold-rimmed glass. He approached Benyon with a prudent, civil, punctual air, as if he habitually met a good many gentlemen in the course of business,

and though, naturally, this was not that sort of occasion he was not a man to waste time in preliminaries. Benyon had immediately the impression of having seen him — or his equivalent — a thousand times before. He was middle-aged, fresh-colored, whiskered, prosperous, indefinite. Georgina introduced them to each other. She spoke of Benyon as an old friend whom she had known long before she had known Mr. Roy, who had been very kind to her years ago, when she was a girl.

"He 's in the navy. He has just come back from a long cruise."

Mr. Roy shook hands, — Benyon gave him his before he knew it, — said he was very happy, smiled, looked at Benyon from head to foot, then at Georgina, then round the room, then back at Benyon again, — at Benyon, who stood there, without sound or movement, with a dilated eye, and a pulse quickened to a degree of which Mr. Roy could have little idea. Georgina made some remark about their sitting down, but William Roy replied that he had n't time for that, — if Captain Benyon would excuse him. He should have to go straight into the library, and write a note to send back to his office, where, as he just remembered, he had neglected to give, in leaving the place, an important direction.

"You can wait a moment, surely," Georgina said. "Captain Benyon wants so much to see you."

"Oh, yes, my dear; I can wait a minute, and I can come back."

Benyon saw, accordingly, that he was waiting, and that Georgina was waiting too. Each was waiting for him to say something, though they were waiting for different things. Mr. Roy put his hands behind him, balanced himself on his toes, hoped that Captain Benyon had enjoyed his cruise, — though he should n't care much for the navy himself, — and evidently wondered at the stolidity of his wife's visitor. Benyon knew he was speaking, for he indulged in two or three more observations, after which he stopped. But his meaning was not present to our hero. This personage was conscious of only one thing, of his own momentary power, — of everything that hung on his lips; all the rest swam before him; there was vagueness in his ears and eyes. Mr. Roy stopped, as I say, and there was a pause, which seemed to Benyon of tremendous length. He knew, while it lasted, that Georgina was as conscious as himself that he felt his opportunity, that he held it there in his hand, weighing it noiselessly in the palm, and that she braved and scorned, or, rather, that she enjoyed, the danger. He asked himself whether he should be able to speak if he were to try, and then he knew that he should not, that the words would stick in his throat, that he should make sounds that would dishonor his cause. There was no real choice or decision, then, on Benyon's part; his silence was after all the same old silence, the fruit of other hours and places, the stillness to which Georgina listened, while he felt her eager eyes fairly eat into his face, so that

his cheeks burned with the touch of them. The moments stood before him in their turn; each one was distinct. "Ah, well," said Mr. Roy, "perhaps I interrupt, — I 'll just dash off my note." Benyon knew that he was rather bewildered, that he was making a pretext, that he was leaving the room; knew presently that Georgina again stood before him alone.

"You are exactly the man I thought you!" she announced, as joyously as if she had won a bet.

"You are the most horrible woman I can imagine. Good God! if I *had* had to live with you!" That is what he said to her in answer.

Even at this she never flushed; she continued to smile in triumph. "He adores me — but what's that to you? Of course you have all the future," she went on; "but I know you as if I had made you!"

Benyon reflected a moment. "If he adores you, you are all right. If our divorce is pronounced, you will be free, and then he can marry you properly, which he would like ever so much better."

"It's too touching to hear you reason about it. Fancy me telling such a hideous story — about myself — me — *me!*" And she touched her breasts with her white fingers.

Benyon gave her a look that was charged with all the sickness of his helpless rage. "You — *you!*" he repeated, as he turned away from her and passed through the door which Mr. Roy had left open.

She followed him into the hall, she was close behind him; he moved before her as she pressed. "There was one more reason," she said. "I would n't be forbidden. It was my hideous pride. That 's what prevents me now."

"I don't care what it is," Benyon answered, wearily, with his hand on the knob of the door.

She laid hers on his shoulder; he stood there an instant feeling it, wishing that her loathsome touch gave him the right to strike her to the earth, — to strike her so that she should never rise again.

"How clever you are, and intelligent always, — as you used to be; to feel so perfectly and know so well, without more scenes, that it 's hopeless — my ever consenting! If I have, with you, the shame of having made you promise, let me at least have the profit!"

His back had been turned to her, but at this he glanced round. "To hear you talk of shame — !"

"You don't know what I have gone through; but, of course, I don't ask any pity from you. Only I should like to say something kind to you before we part. I admire you, esteem you: I don't many people! Who will ever tell her, if you don't? How will she ever know, then? She will be as safe as I am. You know what that is," said Georgina, smiling.

He had opened the door while she spoke, apparently not heeding her, thinking only of getting away from her forever. In reality he heard every word she said, and felt to his marrow the lowered, sugges-

tive tone in which she made him that last recommendation. Outside, on the steps — she stood there in the doorway — he gave her his last look. "I only hope you will die. I shall pray for that!" And he descended into the street and took his way.

It was after this that his real temptation came. Not the temptation to return betrayal for betrayal; that passed away even in a few days, for he simply knew that he could n't break his promise, that it imposed itself on him as stubbornly as the color of his eyes or the stammer of his lips; it had gone forth into the world to live for itself, and was far beyond his reach or his authority. But the temptation to go through the form of a marriage with Kate Theory, to let her suppose that he was as free as herself, and that their children, if they should have any, would, before the law, have a right to exist, — this attractive idea held him fast for many weeks, and caused him to pass some haggard nights and days. It was perfectly possible she might learn his secret, and that, as no one could either suspect it or have an interest in bringing it to light, they both might live and die in security and honor. This vision fascinated him; it was, I say, a real temptation. He thought of other solutions, — of telling her that he was married (without telling her to whom), and inducing her to overlook such an accident, and content herself with a ceremony in which the world would see no flaw. But after all the contortions of his spirit it remained as clear to him as before that

dishonor was in everything but renunciation. So, at last, he renounced. He took two steps which attested this act to himself. He addressed an urgent request to the Secretary of the Navy that he might, with as little delay as possible, be despatched on another long voyage; and he returned to Boston to tell Kate Theory that they must wait. He could explain so little that, say what he would, he was aware that he could not make his conduct seem natural, and he saw that the girl only trusted him, — that she never understood. She trusted without understanding, and she agreed to wait. When the writer of these pages last heard of the pair they were waiting still.

# THE PATH OF DUTY.

# THE PATH OF DUTY.

I AM glad I said to you the other night at Doubleton, inquiring — too inquiring — compatriot, that I would n't undertake to tell you the story (about Ambrose Tester), but would write it out for you; inasmuch as, thinking it over since I came back to town, I see that it may really be made interesting. It *is* a story, with a regular development, and for telling it I have the advantage that I happened to know about it from the first, and was more or less in the confidence of every one concerned. Then it will amuse me to write it, and I shall do so as carefully and as cleverly as possible. The first winter days in London are not madly gay, so that I have plenty of time; and if the fog is brown outside, the fire is red within. I like the quiet of this season; the glowing chimney-corner, in the midst of the December mirk, makes me think, as I sit by it, of all sorts of things. The idea that is almost always uppermost is the bigness and strangeness of this London world. Long as I have lived here, — the sixteenth anniversary of my marriage is only ten days off, — there is still a kind

of novelty and excitement in it. It is a great pull, as they say here, to have remained sensitive, — to have kept one's own point of view. I mean it's more entertaining, — it makes you see a thousand things (not that they are all very charming). But the pleasure of observation does not in the least depend on the beauty of what one observes. You see innumerable little dramas; in fact, almost everything has acts and scenes, like a comedy. Very often it is a comedy with tears. There have been a good many of them, I am afraid, in the case I am speaking of. It is because this history of Sir Ambrose Tester and Lady Vandeleur struck me, when you asked me about the relations of the parties, as having that kind of progression, that when I was on the point of responding, I checked myself, thinking it a pity to tell you a little when I might tell you all. I scarcely know what made you ask, inasmuch as I had said nothing to excite your curiosity. Whatever you suspected, you suspected on your own hook, as they say. You had simply noticed the pair together that evening at Doubleton. If you suspected anything in particular, it is a proof that you are rather sharp, because they are very careful about the way they behave in public. At least they think they are. The result, perhaps, doesn't necessarily follow. If I have been in their confidence you may say that I make a strange use of my privilege in serving them up to feed the prejudices of an opinionated American. You think English society very wicked, and my little story will probably not

correct the impression. Though, after all, I don't see why it should minister to it; for what I said to you (it was all I did say) remains the truth. They are treading together the path of duty. You would be quite right about its being base in me to betray them. It is very true that they have ceased to confide in me; even Joscelind has said nothing to me for more than a year. That is doubtless a sign that the situation is more serious than before, all round, — too serious to be talked about. It is also true that you are remarkably discreet, and that even if you were not it would not make much difference, inasmuch as if you were to repeat my revelations in America, no one would know whom you were talking about. But all the same, I should be base; and, therefore, after I have written out my reminiscences for your delectation, I shall simply keep them for my own. You must content yourself with the explanation I have already given you of Sir Ambrose Tester and Lady Vandeleur: they are following — hand in hand, as it were — the path of duty. This will not prevent me from telling everything; on the contrary, don't you see?

## I.

His brilliant prospects dated from the death of his brother, who had no children, had indeed steadily refused to marry. When I say brilliant prospects, I mean the vision of the baronetcy, one of the oldest in England, of a charming seventeenth-century house,

with its park, in Dorsetshire, and a property worth some twenty thousand a year. Such a collection of items is still dazzling to me, even after what you would call, I suppose, a familiarity with British grandeur. My husband is n't a baronet (or we probably should n't be in London in December), and he is far, alas, from having twenty thousand a year. The full enjoyment of these luxuries, on Ambrose Tester's part, was dependent naturally, on the death of his father, who was still very much to the fore at the time I first knew the young man. The proof of it is the way he kept nagging at his sons, as the younger used to say, on the question of taking a wife. The nagging had been of no avail, as I have mentioned, with regard to Francis, the elder, whose affections were centred (his brother himself told me) on the wine-cup and the faro-table. He was not an exemplary or edifying character, and as the heir to an honorable name and a fine estate was very unsatisfactory indeed. It had been possible in those days to put him into the army, but it was not possible to keep him there; and he was still a very young man when it became plain that any parental dream of a "career" for Frank Tester was exceedingly vain. Old Sir Edmund had thought matrimony would perhaps correct him, but a sterner process than this was needed, and it came to him one day at Monaco — he was most of the time abroad — after an illness so short that none of the family arrived in time. He was reformed altogether, he was utterly abolished.

The second son, stepping into his shoes, was such an improvement that it was impossible there should be much simulation of mourning. You have seen him, you know what he is; there is very little mystery about him. As I am not going to show this composition to you, there is no harm in my writing here that he is — or at any rate he was — a remarkably attractive man. I don't say this because he made love to me, but precisely because he did n't. He was always in love with some one else, — generally with Lady Vandeleur. You may say that in England that usually does n't prevent; but Mr. Tester, though he had almost no intermissions, did n't, as a general thing, have duplicates. He was not provided with a second loved object, "under-studying," as they say, the part. It was his practice to keep me accurately informed of the state of his affections, — a matter about which he was never in the least vague. When he was in love he knew it and rejoiced in it, and when by a miracle he was not he greatly regretted it. He expatiated to me on the charms of other persons, and this interested me much more than if he had attempted to direct the conversation to my own, as regards which I had no illusions. He has told me some singular things, and I think I may say that for a considerable period my most valued knowledge of English society was extracted from this genial youth. I suppose he usually found me a woman of good counsel, for certain it is that he has appealed to me for the light of wisdom in very extraordinary

predicaments. In his earlier years he was perpetually in hot water; he tumbled into scrapes as children tumble into puddles. He invited them, he invented them; and when he came to tell you how his trouble had come about (and he always told the whole truth), it was difficult to believe that a man should have been so idiotic.

And yet he was not an idiot; he was supposed to be very clever, and certainly is very quick and amusing. He was only reckless, and extraordinarily natural, as natural as if he had been an Irishman. In fact, of all the Englishmen that I have known he is the most Irish in temperament (though he has got over it comparatively of late). I used to tell him that it was a great inconvenience that he did n't speak with a brogue, because then we should be forewarned, and know with whom we were dealing. He replied that, by analogy, if he were Irish enough to have a brogue he would probably be English, which seemed to me an answer wonderfully in character. Like most young Britons of his class he went to America, to see the great country, before he was twenty, and he took a letter to my father, who had occasion, *à propos* of some pickle of course, to render him a considerable service. This led to his coming to see me — I had already been living here three or four years — on his return; and that, in the course of time, led to our becoming fast friends, without, as I tell you, the smallest philandering on either side. But I must n't protest too much; I shall excite your

suspicion. "If he has made love to so many women, why should n't he have made love to you?" — some inquiry of that sort you will be likely to make. I have answered it already, "Simply on account of those very engagements." He could n't make love to every one, and with me it would n't have done him the least good. It was a more amiable weakness than his brother's, and he has always behaved very well. How well he behaved on a very important occasion is precisely the subject of my story.

He was supposed to have embraced the diplomatic career; had been secretary of legation at some German capital; but after his brother's death he came home and looked out for a seat in Parliament. He found it with no great trouble and has kept it ever since. No one would have the heart to turn him out, he is so good-looking. It's a great thing to be represented by one of the handsomest men in England, it creates such a favorable association of ideas. Any one would be amazed to discover that the borough he sits for, and the name of which I am always forgetting, is not a very pretty place. I have never seen it, and have no idea that it is n't, and I am sure he will survive every revolution. The people must feel that if they should n't keep him some monster would be returned. You remember his appearance, — how tall, and fair, and strong he is, and always laughing, yet without looking silly. He is exactly the young man girls in America figure to themselves — in the place of the hero — when they read English

novels, and wish to imagine something very aristocratic and Saxon. A "bright Bostonian" who met him once at my house, exclaimed as soon as he had gone out of the room, "At last, at last, I behold it, the mustache of Roland Tremayne!"

"Of Roland Tremayne!"

"Don't you remember in *A Lawless Love*, how often it's mentioned, and how glorious and golden it was? Well, I have never seen it till now, but now I *have* seen it!"

If you had n't seen Ambrose Tester, the best description I could give of him would be to say that he looked like Roland Tremayne. I don't know whether that hero was a "strong Liberal," but this is what Sir Ambrose is supposed to be. (He succeeded his father two years ago, but I shall come to that.) He is not exactly what I should call thoughtful, but he is interested, or thinks he is, in a lot of things that I don't understand, and that one sees and skips in the newspapers, — volunteering, and redistribution, and sanitation, and the representation of minors — minorities — what is it? When I said just now that he is always laughing, I ought to have explained that I did n't mean when he is talking to Lady Vandeleur. She makes him serious, makes him almost solemn; by which I don't mean that she bores him. Far from it; but when he is in her company he is thoughtful; he pulls his golden mustache, and Roland Tremayne looks as if his vision were turned in, and he were meditating on her words. He does n't

say much himself; it is she — she used to be so silent — who does the talking. She has plenty to say to him; she describes to him the charms that she discovers in the path of duty. He seldom speaks in the House, I believe, but when he does it 's off-hand, and amusing, and sensible, and every one likes it. He will never be a great statesman, but he will add to the softness of Dorsetshire, and remain, in short, a very gallant, pleasant, prosperous, typical English gentleman, with a name, a fortune, a perfect appearance, a devoted, bewildered little wife, a great many reminiscences, a great many friends (including Lady Vandeleur and myself), and, strange to say, with all these advantages, something that faintly resembles a conscience.

## II.

FIVE years ago he told me his father insisted on his marrying, — would not hear of his putting it off any longer. Sir Edmund had been harping on this string ever since he came back from Germany, had made it both a general and a particular request, not only urging him to matrimony in the abstract, but pushing him into the arms of every young woman in the country. Ambrose had promised, procrastinated, temporized; but at last he was at the end of his evasions, and his poor father had taken the tone of supplication. "He thinks immensely of the name, of the place and all that, and he has got it into his head that if I don't marry before he dies, I won't marry

after." So much I remember Ambrose Tester said to me. "It's a fixed idea; he has got it on the brain. He wants to see me married with his eyes, and he wants to take his grandson in his arms. Not without that will he be satisfied that the whole thing will go straight. He thinks he is nearing his end, but he is n't, — he will live to see a hundred, don't you think so? — and he has made me a solemn appeal to put an end to what he calls his suspense. He has an idea some one will get hold of me — some woman I can't marry. As if I were not old enough to take care of myself!"

"Perhaps he is afraid of me," I suggested, facetiously.

"No, it is n't you," said my visitor, betraying by his tone that it was some one, though he did n't say whom. "That 's all rot, of course; one marries sooner or later, and I shall do like every one else. If I marry before I die, it 's as good as if I marry before he dies, is n't it? I should be delighted to have the governor at my wedding, but it is n't necessary for the legality, is it?"

I asked him what he wished me to do, and how I could help him. He knew already my peculiar views, that I was trying to get husbands for all the girls of my acquaintance and to prevent the men from taking wives. The sight of an unmarried woman afflicted me, and yet when my male friends changed their state I took it as a personal offence. He let me know that so far as he was concerned I must prepare

myself for this injury, for he had given his father his word that another twelvemonth should not see him a bachelor. The old man had given him *carte blanche;* he made no condition beyond exacting that the lady should have youth and health. Ambrose Tester, at any rate, had taken a vow and now he was going seriously to look about him. I said to him that what must be must be, and that there were plenty of charming girls about the land, among whom he could suit himself easily enough. There was no better match in England, I said, and he would only have to make his choice. That however is not what I thought, for my real reflections were summed up in the silent exclamation, "What a pity Lady Vandeleur is n't a widow!" I had n't the smallest doubt that if she were he would marry her on the spot; and after he had gone I wondered considerably what *she* thought of this turn in his affairs. If it was disappointing to me, how little it must be to *her* taste! Sir Edmund had not been so much out of the way in fearing there might be obstacles to his son's taking the step he desired. Margaret Vandeleur was an obstacle. I knew it as well as if Mr. Tester had told me.

I don't mean there was anything in their relation he might not freely have alluded to, for Lady Vandeleur, in spite of her beauty and her tiresome husband, was not a woman who could be accused of an indiscretion. Her husband was a pedant about trifles, — the shape of his hat-brim, the *pose* of his coachman, and cared for nothing else; but she was as nearly a

saint as one may be when one has rubbed shoulders for ten years with the best society in Europe. It is a characteristic of that society that even its saints are suspected, and I go too far in saying that little pin-pricks were not administered, in considerable numbers, to her reputation. But she did n't feel them, for still more than Ambrose Tester she was a person to whose happiness a good conscience was necessary. I should almost say that for her happiness it was sufficient, and, at any rate, it was only those who did n't know her that pretended to speak of her lightly. If one had the honor of her acquaintance one might have thought her rather shut up to her beauty and her grandeur, but one could n't but feel there was something in her composition that would keep her from vulgar aberrations. Her husband was such a feeble type that she must have felt doubly she had been put upon her honor. To deceive such a man as that was to make him more ridiculous than he was already, and from such a result a woman bearing his name may very well have shrunk. Perhaps it would have been worse for Lord Vandeleur, who had every pretension of his order and none of its amiability, if he had been a better, or at least, a cleverer man. When a woman behaves so well she is not obliged to be careful, and there is no need of consulting appearances when one is one's self an appearance. Lady Vandeleur accepted Ambrose Tester's attentions, and Heaven knows they were frequent; but she had such an air of perfect equilibrium that

one could n't see her, in imagination, bend responsive. Incense was incense, but one saw her sitting quite serene among the fumes. That honor of her acquaintance of which I just now spoke it had been given me to enjoy; that is to say, I met her a dozen times in the season in a hot crowd, and we smiled sweetly and murmured a vague question or two, without hearing, or even trying to hear, each other's answer. If I knew that Ambrose Tester was perpetually in and out of her house and always arranging with her that they should go to the same places, I doubt whether she, on her side, knew how often he came to see me. I don't think he would have let her know, and am conscious, in saying this, that it indicated an advanced state of intimacy (with her, I mean).

I also doubt very much whether he asked her to look about, on his behalf, for a future Lady Tester. This request he was so good as to make of me; but I told him I would have nothing to do with the matter. If Joscelind is unhappy, I am thankful to say the responsibility is not mine. I have found English husbands for two or three American girls, but providing English wives is a different affair. I know the sort of men that will suit women, but one would have to be very clever to know the sort of women that will suit men. I told Ambrose Tester that he must look out for himself, but, in spite of his promise, I had very little belief that he would do anything of the sort. I thought it probable that the old baronet would pass away without seeing a new generation

come in; though when I intimated as much to Mr. Tester, he made answer in substance (it was not quite so crudely said) that his father, old as he was, would hold on till his bidding was done, and if it should not be done, he would hold on out of spite. "Oh, he will tire me out;" that I remember Ambrose Tester did say. I had done him injustice, for six months later he told me he was engaged. It had all come about very suddenly. From one day to the other the right young woman had been found. I forget who had found her; some aunt or cousin, I think; it had not been the young man himself. But when she was found, he rose to the occasion; he took her up seriously, he approved of her thoroughly, and I am not sure that he didn't fall a little in love with her, ridiculous (excuse my London tone) as this accident may appear. He told me that his father was delighted, and I knew afterwards that he had good reason to be. It was not till some weeks later that I saw the girl; but meanwhile I had received the pleasantest impression of her, and this impression came — must have come — mainly from what her intended told me. That proves that he spoke with some positiveness, spoke as if he really believed he was doing a good thing. I had it on my tongue's end to ask him how Lady Vandeleur liked her, but I fortunately checked this vulgar inquiry. He liked her evidently, as I say; every one liked her, and when I knew her I liked her better even than the others. I like her to-day more than ever; it is fair

you should know that, in reading this account of her situation. It doubtless colors my picture, gives a point to my sense of the strangeness of my little story.

Joscelind Bernardstone came of a military race, and had been brought up in camps, — by which I don't mean she was one of those objectionable young women who are known as garrison hacks. She was in the flower of her freshness, and had been kept in the tent, receiving, as an only daughter, the most "particular" education from the excellent Lady Emily (General Bernardstone married a daughter of Lord Clanduffy), who looks like a pink-faced rabbit, and is (after Joscelind) one of the nicest women I know. When I met them in a country-house, a few weeks after the marriage was "arranged," as they say here, Joscelind won my affections by saying to me, with her timid directness (the speech made me feel sixty years old), that she must thank me for having been so kind to Mr. Tester. You saw her at Doubleton, and you will remember that though she has no regular beauty, many a prettier woman would be very glad to look like her. She is as fresh as a new-laid egg, as light as a feather, as strong as a mail-phaeton. She is perfectly mild, yet she is clever enough to be sharp if she would. I don't know that clever women are necessarily thought ill-natured, but it is usually taken for granted that amiable women are very limited. Lady Tester is a refutation of the theory, which must have been

invented by a vixenish woman who was *not* clever. She has an adoration for her husband, which absorbs her without in the least making her silly, unless indeed it is silly to be modest, as in this brutal world I sometimes believe. Her modesty is so great that being unhappy has hitherto presented itself to her as a form of egotism, — that egotism which she has too much delicacy to cultivate. She is by no means sure that if being married to her beautiful baronet is not the ideal state she dreamed it, the weak point of the affair is not simply in her own presumption. It does n't express her condition, at present, to say that she is unhappy or disappointed, or that she has a sense of injury. All this is latent; meanwhile, what is obvious, is that she is bewildered, — she simply does n't understand; and her perplexity, to me, is unspeakably touching. She looks about her for some explanation, some light. She fixes her eyes on mine sometimes, and on those of other people, with a kind of searching dumbness, as if there were some chance that I — that they — may explain, may tell her what it is that has happened to her. I can explain very well, but not to her, — only to you!

## III.

It was a brilliant match for Miss Bernardstone, who had no fortune at all, and all her friends were of the opinion that she had done very well. After Easter she was in London with her people, and I saw a

good deal of them, in fact, I rather cultivated them. They might perhaps even have thought me a little patronizing, if they had been given to thinking that sort of thing. But they were not; that is not in their line. English people are very apt to attribute motives, — some of them attribute much worse ones than we poor simpletons in America recognize, than we have even heard of! But that is only some of them; others don't, but take everything literally and genially. That was the case with the Bernardstones; you could be sure that on their way home, after dining with you, they would n't ask each other how in the world any one could call you pretty, or say that many people *did* believe, all the same, that you had poisoned your grandfather.

Lady Emily was exceedingly gratified at her daughter's engagement; of course she was very quiet about it, she did n't clap her hands or drag in Mr. Tester's name; but it was easy to see that she felt a kind of maternal peace, an abiding satisfaction. The young man behaved as well as possible, was constantly seen with Joscelind, and smiled down at her in the kindest, most protecting way. They looked beautiful together; you would have said it was a duty for people whose color matched so well to marry. Of course he was immensely taken up, and did n't come very often to see me; but he came sometimes, and when he sat there he had a look which I did n't understand at first. Presently I saw what it expressed; in my drawing-room he was off duty, he had no

longer to sit up and play a part; he would lean back and rest and draw a long breath, and forget that the day of his execution was fixed. There was to be no indecent haste about the marriage; it was not to take place till after the session, at the end of August. It puzzled me and rather distressed me that his heart should n't be a little more in the matter; it seemed strange to be engaged to so charming a girl and yet go through with it as if it were simply a social duty. If one had n't been in love with her at first, one ought to have been at the end of a week or two. If Ambrose Tester was not (and to me he did n't pretend to be), he carried it off, as I have said, better than I should have expected. He was a gentleman, and he behaved like a gentleman, with the added punctilio, I think, of being sorry for his betrothed. But it was difficult to see what, in the long run, he could expect to make of such a position. If a man marries an ugly, unattractive woman for reasons of state, the thing is comparatively simple; it is understood between them, and he need have no remorse at not offering her a sentiment of which there has been no question. But when he picks out a charming creature to gratify his father and *les convenances*, it is not so easy to be happy in not being able to care for her. It seemed to me that it would have been much better for Ambrose Tester to bestow himself upon a girl who might have given him an excuse for tepidity. His wife should have been healthy but stupid, prolific but morose. Did he expect to continue not to be in love

with Joscelind, or to conceal from her the mechanical nature of his attentions? It was difficult to see how he could wish to do the one or succeed in doing the other. Did he expect such a girl as that would be happy if he did n't love her? and did he think himself capable of being happy if it should turn out that she was miserable? If she should n't be miserable,— that is, if she should be indifferent, and, as they say, console herself, would he like that any better?

I asked myself all these questions and I should have liked to ask them of Mr. Tester; but I did n't, for after all he could n't have answered them. Poor young man! he did n't pry into things as I do; he was not analytic, like us Americans, as they say in reviews. He thought he was behaving remarkably well, and so he was — for a man; that was the strange part of it. It had been proper that in spite of his reluctance he should take a wife, and he had dutifully set about it. As a good thing is better for being well done, he had taken the best one he could possibly find. He was enchanted with — with his young lady, you might ask? Not in the least; with himself; that is the sort of person a man is! Their virtues are more dangerous than their vices, and Heaven preserve you when they want to keep a promise! It is never a promise to *you*, you will notice. A man will sacrifice a woman to live as a gentleman should, and then ask for your sympathy — for *him!* And I don't speak of the bad ones, but of the good. They, after all, are the worst. Ambrose Tester, as I

say, did n't go into these details, but synthetic as he might be, was conscious that his position was false. He felt that sooner or later, and rather sooner than later, he would have to make it true,—a process that could n't possibly be agreeable. He would really have to make up his mind to care for his wife or not to care for her. What would Lady Vandeleur say to one alternative, and what would little Joscelind say to the other? That is what it was to have a pertinacious father and to be an accommodating son. With me, it was easy for Ambrose Tester to be superficial, for, as I tell you, if I did n't wish to engage him, I did n't wish to disengage him, and I did n't insist. Lady Vandeleur insisted, I was afraid; to be with her was of course very complicated; even more than Miss Bernardstone she must have made him feel that his position was false. I must add that he once mentioned to me that she had told him he ought to marry. At any rate, it is an immense thing to be a pleasant fellow. Our young fellow was so universally pleasant that of course his *fiancée* came in for her share. So did Lady Emily, suffused with hope, which made her pinker than ever; she told me he sent flowers even to her. One day in the Park, I was riding early; the Row was almost empty. I came up behind a lady and gentleman who were walking their horses, close to each other, side by side. In a moment I recognized her, but not before seeing that nothing could have been more benevolent than the way Ambrose Tester was bending over his future

wife. If he struck me as a lover at that moment, of course he struck her so. But that is n't the way they ride to-day.

## IV.

ONE day, about the end of June, he came in to see me when I had two or three other visitors; you know that even at that season I am almost always at home from six to seven. He had not been three minutes in the room before I saw that he was different, — different from what he had been the last time, and I guessed that something had happened in relation to his marriage. My visitors did n't, unfortunately, and they stayed and stayed until I was afraid he would have to go away without telling me what, I was sure, he had come for. But he sat them out; I think that by exception they did n't find him pleasant. After we were alone he abused them a little, and then he said, "Have you heard about Vandeleur? He 's very ill. She 's awfully anxious." I had n't heard, and I told him so, asking a question or two; then my inquiries ceased, my breath almost failed me, for I had become aware of something very strange. The way he looked at me when he told me his news was a full confession, — a confession so full that I had needed a moment to take it in. He was not too strong a man to be taken by surprise, — not so strong but that in the presence of an unexpected occasion his first movement was to look about for a little help. I venture to call it help, the sort of thing he came to

me for on that summer afternoon. It is always help when a woman who is not an idiot lets an embarrassed man take up her time. If he too is not an idiot, that does n't diminish the service; on the contrary his superiority to the average helps him to profit. Ambrose Tester had said to me more than once, in the past, that he was capable of telling me things, because I was an American, that he would n't confide to his own people. He had proved it before this, as I have hinted, and I must say that being an American, with him, was sometimes a questionable honor. I don't know whether he thinks us more discreet and more sympathetic (if he keeps up the system: he has abandoned it with me), or only more insensible, more proof against shocks; but it is certain that, like some other Englishmen I have known, he has appeared, in delicate cases, to think I would take a comprehensive view. When I have inquired into the grounds of this discrimination in our favor, he has contented himself with saying, in the British-cursory manner, "Oh, I don't know; you are different!" I remember he remarked once that our impressions were fresher. And I am sure that now it was because of my nationality, in addition to other merits, that he treated me to the confession I have just alluded to. At least I don't suppose he would have gone about saying to people in general, "Her husband will probably die, you know; then why should n't I marry Lady Vandeleur?"

That was the question which his whole expression

and manner asked of me, and of which, after a moment, I decided to take no notice. Why should n't he? There was an excellent reason why he should n't. It would just kill Joscelind Bernardstone; that was why he should n't! The idea that he should be ready to do it frightened me, and independent as he might think my point of view, I had no desire to discuss such abominations. It struck me as an abomination at this very first moment, and I have never wavered in my judgment of it. I am always glad when I can take the measure of a thing as soon as I see it; it 's a blessing to *feel* what we think, without balancing and comparing. It 's a great rest, too, and a great luxury. That, as I say, was the case with the feeling excited in me by this happy idea of Ambrose Tester's. Cruel and wanton I thought it then, cruel and wanton I thought it later, when it was pressed upon me. I knew there were many other people that did n't agree with me, and I can only hope for them that their conviction was as quick and positive as mine; it all depends upon the way a thing strikes one. But I will add to this another remark. I thought I was right then, and I still think I was right; but it strikes me as a pity that I should have wished so much to be right. Why could n't I be content to be wrong; to renounce my influence (since I appeared to possess the mystic article), and let my young friend do as he liked? As you observed the situation at Doubleton, should n't you say it was of a nature to make one wonder

whether, after all, one did render a service to the younger lady?

At all events, as I say, I gave no sign to Ambrose Tester that I understood him, that I guessed what he wished to come to. He got no satisfaction out of me that day; it is very true that he made up for it later. I expressed regret at Lord Vandeleur's illness, inquired into its nature and origin, hoped it would n't prove as grave as might be feared, said I would call at the house and ask about him, commiserated discreetly her ladyship, and in short gave my young man no chance whatever. He knew that I had guessed his *arrière-pensée*, but he let me off for the moment, for which I was thankful; either because he was still ashamed of it, or because he supposed I was reserving myself for the catastrophe, — should it occur. Well, my dear, it did occur, at the end of ten days. Mr. Tester came to see me twice in that interval, each time to tell me that poor Vandeleur was worse; he had some internal inflammation which, in nine cases out of ten, is fatal. His wife was all devotion; she was with him night and day. I had the news from other sources as well; I leave you to imagine whether in London, at the height of the season, such a situation could fail to be considerably discussed. To the discussion as yet, however, I contributed little, and with Ambrose Tester nothing at all. I was still on my guard. I never admitted for a moment that it was possible there should be any change in his plans. By this time, I think, he had quite ceased to be

ashamed of his idea, he was in a state almost of exaltation about it; but he was very angry with me for not giving him an opening.

As I look back upon the matter now, there is something almost amusing in the way we watched each other, — he thinking that I evaded his question only to torment him (he believed me, or pretended to believe me, capable of this sort of perversity), and I determined not to lose ground by betraying an insight into his state of mind which he might twist into an expression of sympathy. I wished to leave my sympathy where I had placed it, with Lady Emily and her daughter, of whom I continued, bumping against them at parties, to have some observation. They gave no signal of alarm; of course it would have been premature. The girl, I am sure, had no idea of the existence of a rival. How they had kept her in the dark I don't know; but it was easy to see she was too much in love to suspect or to criticise. With Lady Emily it was different; she was a woman of charity, but she touched the world at too many points not to feel its vibrations. However, the dear little woman planted herself firmly; to the eye she was still enough. It was not from Ambrose Tester that I first heard of Lord Vandeleur's death; it was announced, with a quarter of a column of "padding," in the *Times*. I have always known the *Times* was a wonderful journal, but this never came home to me so much as when it produced a quarter of a column about Lord Vandeleur. It was a triumph

of word-spinning. If he had carried out his vocation, if he had been a tailor or a hatter (that's how I see him), there might have been something to say about him. But he missed his vocation, he missed everything but posthumous honors. I was so sure Ambrose Tester would come in that afternoon, and so sure he knew I should expect him, that I threw over an engagement on purpose. But he didn't come in, nor the next day, nor the next. There were two possible explanations of his absence. One was that he was giving all his time to consoling Lady Vandeleur; the other was that he was giving it all, as a blind, to Joscelind Bernardstone. Both proved incorrect, for when he at last turned up he told me he had been for a week in the country, at his father's. Sir Edmund also had been unwell; but he had pulled through better than poor Lord Vandeleur. I wondered at first whether his son had been talking over with him the question of a change of base; but guessed in a moment that he had not suffered this alarm. I don't think that Ambrose would have spared him if he had thought it necessary to give him warning; but he probably held that his father would have no ground for complaint so long as he should marry some one; would have no right to remonstrate if he simply transferred his contract. Lady Vandeleur had had two children (whom she had lost), and might, therefore, have others whom she shouldn't lose; that would have been a reply to nice discriminations on Sir Edmund's part.

## V.

In reality, what the young man had been doing was thinking it over beneath his ancestral oaks and beeches. His countenance showed this, — showed it more than Miss Bernardstone could have liked. He looked like a man who was crossed, not like a man who was happy, in love. I was no more disposed than before to help him out with his plot, but at the end of ten minutes we were articulately discussing it. When I say *we* were, I mean he was; for I sat before him quite mute, at first, and amazed at the clearness with which, before his conscience, he had argued his case. He had persuaded himself that it was quite a simple matter to throw over poor Joscelind and keep himself free for the expiration of Lady Vandeleur's term of mourning. The deliberations of an impulsive man sometimes land him in strange countries. Ambrose Tester confided his plan to me as a tremendous secret. He professed to wish immensely to know how it appeared to me, and whether my woman's wit could n't discover for him some loophole big enough round, some honorable way of not keeping faith. Yet at the same time he seemed not to foresee that I should, of necessity, be simply horrified. Disconcerted and perplexed (a little), that he was prepared to find me; but if I had refused, as yet, to come to his assistance, he appeared to suppose it was only because of the real difficulty of suggest-

ing to him that perfect pretext of which he was in want. He evidently counted upon me, however, for some illuminating proposal, and I think he would have liked to say to me, "You have always pretended to be a great friend of mine," — I had n't; the pretension was all on his side, — "and now is your chance to show it. Go to Joscelind and make her feel (women have a hundred ways of doing that sort of thing), that through Vandeleur's death the change in my situation is complete. If she is the girl I take her for, she will know what to do in the premises."

I was not prepared to oblige him to this degree, and I lost no time in telling him so, after my first surprise at seeing how definite his purpose had become. His contention, after all, was very simple. He had been in love with Lady Vandeleur for years, and was now more in love with her than ever. There had been no appearance of her being, within a calculable period, liberated by the death of her husband. This nobleman was — he did n't say what just then (it was too soon) — but he was only forty years old, and in such health and preservation as to make such a contingency infinitely remote. Under these circumstances, Ambrose had been driven, for the most worldly reasons — he was ashamed of them, pah! — into an engagement with a girl he did n't love, and did n't pretend to love. Suddenly the unexpected occurred; the woman he did love had become accessible to him, and all the relations of things were altered.

Why should n't he alter, too? Why should n't Miss Bernardstone alter, Lady Emily alter, and every one alter? It would be *wrong* in him to marry Joscelind in so changed a world; — a moment's consideration would certainly assure me of that. He could no longer carry out his part of the bargain, and the transaction must stop before it went any further. If Joscelind knew, she would be the first to recognize this, and the thing for her now was to know.

"Go and tell her, then, if you are so sure of it," I said. "I wonder you have put it off so many days."

He looked at me with a melancholy eye. "Of course I know it 's beastly awkward."

It was beastly awkward certainly; there I could quite agree with him, and this was the only sympathy he extracted from me. It was impossible to be less helpful, less merciful, to an embarrassed young man than I was on that occasion. But other occasions followed very quickly, on which Mr. Tester renewed his appeal with greater eloquence. He assured me that it was torture to be with his intended, and every hour that he did n't break off committed him more deeply and more fatally. I repeated only once my previous question, — asked him only once why then he did n't tell her he had changed his mind. The inquiry was idle, was even unkind, for my young man was in a very tight place. He did n't tell her, simply because he could n't, in spite of the anguish of feeling that his chance to right himself was rapidly

passing away. When I asked him if Joscelind appeared to have guessed nothing, he broke out, "How in the world can she guess, when I am so kind to her? I am so sorry for her, poor little wretch, that I can't help being nice to her. And from the moment I am nice to her she thinks it 's all right."

I could see perfectly what he meant by that, and I liked him more for this little generosity than I disliked him for his nefarious scheme. In fact, I did n't dislike him at all when I saw what an influence my judgment would have on him. I very soon gave him the full benefit of it. I had thought over his case with all the advantages of his own presentation of it, and it was impossible for me to see how he could decently get rid of the girl. That, as I have said, had been my original opinion, and quickened reflection only confirmed it. As I have also said, I had n't in the least recommended him to become engaged; but once he had done so I recommended him to abide by it. It was all very well being in love with Lady Vandeleur; he might be in love with her, but he had n't promised to marry her. It was all very well not being in love with Miss Bernardstone; but, as it happened, he had promised to marry her, and in my country a gentleman was supposed to keep such promises. If it was a question of keeping them only so long as was convenient, where would any of us be? I assure you I became very eloquent and moral,— yes, moral, I maintain the word, in spite of your perhaps thinking (as you are very capable of doing) that

I ought to have advised him in just the opposite sense. It was not a question of love, but of marriage, for he had never promised to love poor Joscelind. It was useless his saying it was dreadful to marry without love; he knew that he thought it, and the people he lived with thought it, nothing of the kind. Half his friends had married on those terms. "Yes, and a pretty sight their private life presented!" That might be, but it was the first time I had ever heard him say it. A fortnight before he had been quite ready to do like the others. I knew what I thought, and I suppose I expressed it with some clearness, for my arguments made him still more uncomfortable, unable as he was either to accept them or to act in contempt of them. Why he should have cared so much for my opinion is a mystery I can't elucidate; to understand my little story, you must simply swallow it. That he did care is proved by the exasperation with which he suddenly broke out, "Well, then, as I understand you, what you recommend me is to marry Miss Bernardstone, and carry on an intrigue with Lady Vandeleur!"

He knew perfectly that I recommended nothing of the sort, and he must have been very angry to indulge in this *boutade*. He told me that other people did n't think as I did — that every one was of the opinion that between a woman he did n't love and a woman he had adored for years it was a plain moral duty not to hesitate. "Don't hesitate then!" I exclaimed; but I did n't get rid of him with this, for

he returned to the charge more than once (he came to me so often that I thought he must neglect both his other alternatives), and let me know again that the voice of society was quite against my view. You will doubtless be surprised at such an intimation that he had taken "society" into his confidence, and wonder whether he went about asking people whether they thought he might back out. I can't tell you exactly, but I know that for some weeks his dilemma was a great deal talked about. His friends perceived he was at the parting of the roads, and many of them had no difficulty in saying which one *they* would take. Some observers thought he ought to do nothing, to leave things as they were. Others took very high ground and discoursed upon the sanctity of love and the wickedness of really deceiving the girl, as that would be what it would amount to (if he should lead her to the altar). Some held that it was too late to escape, others maintained that it is never too late. Some thought Miss Bernardstone very much to be pitied; some reserved their compassion for Ambrose Tester; others, still, lavished it upon Lady Vandeleur. The prevailing opinion, I think, was that he ought to obey the promptings of his heart — London cares so much for the heart! Or is it that London is simply ferocious, and always prefers the spectacle that is more entertaining? As it would prolong the drama for the young man to throw over Miss Bernardstone, there was a considerable readiness to see the poor girl sacrificed. She was like a Christian

maiden in the Roman arena. That is what Ambrose Tester meant by telling me that public opinion was on his side. I don't think he chattered about his quandary, but people, knowing his situation, guessed what was going on in his mind, and he on his side guessed what they said. London discussions might as well go on in the whispering-gallery of St. Paul's.

I could of course do only one thing, — I could but reaffirm my conviction that the Roman attitude, as I may call it, was cruel, was falsely sentimental. This naturally did n't help him as he wished to be helped, — did n't remove the obstacle to his marrying in a year or two Lady Vandeleur. Yet he continued to look to me for inspiration, — I must say it at the cost of making him appear a very feeble-minded gentleman. There was a moment when I thought him capable of an oblique movement, of temporizing with a view to escape. If he succeeded in postponing his marriage long enough, the Bernardstones would throw *him* over, and I suspect that for a day he entertained the idea of fixing this responsibility on them. But he was too honest and too generous to do so for longer, and his destiny was staring him in the face when an accident gave him a momentary relief. General Bernardstone died, after an illness as sudden and short as that which had carried off Lord Vandeleur; his wife and daughter were plunged into mourning and immediately retired into the country. A week later we heard that the girl's marriage would be put off for several months, — partly on

account of her mourning, and partly because her mother, whose only companion she had now become, could not bear to part with her at the time originally fixed and actually so near. People of course looked at each other, — said it was the beginning of the end, a "dodge" of Ambrose Tester's. I wonder they did n't accuse him of poisoning the poor old general. I know to a certainty that he had nothing to do with the delay, that the proposal came from Lady Emily, who, in her bereavement, wished, very naturally, to keep a few months longer the child she was going to lose forever. It must be said, in justice to her prospective son-in-law, that he was capable either of resigning himself or of frankly (with however many blushes) telling Joscelind he could n't keep his agreement, but was not capable of trying to wriggle out of his difficulty. The plan of simply telling Joscelind he could n't, — this was the one he had fixed upon as the best, and this was the one of which I remarked to him that it had a defect which should be counted against its advantages. The defect was that it would kill Joscelind on the spot.

I think he believed me, and his believing me made this unexpected respite very welcome to him. There was no knowing what might happen in the interval, and he passed a large part of it in looking for an issue. And yet, at the same time, he kept up the usual forms with the girl whom in his heart he had renounced. I was told more than once (for I had lost sight of the pair during the summer and autumn)

that these forms were at times very casual, that he neglected Miss Bernardstone most flagrantly, and had quite resumed his old intimacy with Lady Vandeleur. I don't exactly know what was meant by this, for she spent the first three months of her widowhood in complete seclusion, in her own old house in Norfolk, where he certainly was not staying with her. I believe he stayed some time, for the partridge shooting, at a place a few miles off. It came to my ears that if Miss Bernardstone did n't take the hint it was because she was determined to stick to him through thick and thin. She never offered to let him off, and I was sure she never would; but I was equally sure that, strange as it may appear, he had not ceased to be nice to her. I have never exactly understood why he did n't hate her, and I am convinced that he was not a comedian in his conduct to her, — he was only a good fellow. I have spoken of the satisfaction that Sir Edmund took in his daughter-in-law that was to be; he delighted in looking at her, longed for her when she was out of his sight, and had her, with her mother, staying with him in the country for weeks together. If Ambrose was not so constantly at her side as he might have been, this deficiency was covered by his father's devotion to her, by her appearance of being already one of the family. Mr. Tester was away as he might be away if they were already married.

## VI.

In October I met him at Doubleton; we spent three days there together. He was enjoying his respite, as he did n't scruple to tell me; and he talked to me a great deal — as usual — about Lady Vandeleur. He did n't mention Joscelind's name, except by implication in this assurance of how much he valued his weeks of grace.

"Do you mean to say that, under the circumstances, Lady Vandeleur is willing to marry you?"

I made this inquiry more expressively, doubtless, than before; for when we had talked of the matter then he had naturally spoken of her consent as a simple contingency. It was contingent upon the lapse of the first months of her bereavement; it was not a question he could begin to press a few days after her husband's death.

"Not immediately, of course; but if I wait, I think so." That, I remember, was his answer.

"If you wait till you get rid of that poor girl, of course."

"She knows nothing about that, — it 's none of her business."

"Do you mean to say she does n't know you are engaged?"

"How should she know it, how should she believe it, when she sees how I love her?" the young man exclaimed; but he admitted afterwards that he had

not deceived her, and that she rendered full justice to the motives that had determined him. He thought he could answer for it that she would marry him some day or other.

"Then she is a very cruel woman," I said, "and I should like, if you please, to hear no more about her." He protested against this, and, a month later, brought her up again, for a purpose. The purpose, you will see, was a very strange one indeed. I had then come back to town; it was the early part of December. I supposed he was hunting, with his own hounds; but he appeared one afternoon in my drawing-room and told me I should do him a great favor if I would go and see Lady Vandeleur.

"Go and see her? Where do you mean, in Norfolk?"

"She has come up to London — did n't you know it? She has a lot of business. She will be kept here till Christmas; I wish you would go."

"Why should I go?" I asked. "Won't you be kept here till Christmas too, and is n't that company enough for her?"

"Upon my word, you are cruel," he said, "and it 's a great shame of you, when a man is trying to do his duty and is behaving like a saint."

"Is that what you call saintly, spending all your time with Lady Vandeleur? I will tell you whom I think a saint, if you would like to know."

"You need n't tell me; I know it better than you. I have n't a word to say against her; only she is stupid and has n't any perceptions. If I am stopping

a bit in London you don't understand why; it's as if you had n't any perceptions either! If I am here for a few days, I know what I am about."

"Why should I understand?" I asked, — not very candidly, because I should have been glad to. "It 's your own affair; you know what you are about, as you say, and of course you have counted the cost."

"What cost do you mean? It 's a pretty cost, I can tell you." And then he tried to explain — if I would only enter into it, and not be so suspicious. He was in London for the express purpose of breaking off.

"Breaking off what, — your engagement?"

"No, no, damn my engagement, — the other thing. My acquaintance, my relations —"

"Your intimacy with Lady Van —?" It was not very gentle, but I believe I burst out laughing. "If this is the way you break off, pray what would you do to keep up?"

He flushed, and looked both foolish and angry, for of course it was not very difficult to see my point. But he was — in a very clumsy manner of his own — trying to cultivate a good conscience, and he was getting no credit for it. "I suppose I may be allowed to look at her! It 's a matter we have to talk over. One does n't drop such a friend in half an hour."

"One does n't drop her at all, unless one has the strength to make a sacrifice."

"It 's easy for you to talk of sacrifice. You don't know what she is!" my visitor cried.

"I think I know what she is not. She is not a friend, as you call her, if she encourages you in the wrong, if she does n't help you. No, I have no patience with her," I declared; "I don't like her, and I won't go to see her!"

Mr. Tester looked at me a moment, as if he were too vexed to trust himself to speak. He had to make an effort not to say something rude. That effort, however, he was capable of making, and though he held his hat as if he were going to walk out of the house, he ended by staying, by putting it down again, by leaning his head, with his elbows on his knees, in his hands, and groaning out that he had never heard of anything so impossible, and that he was the most wretched man in England. I was very sorry for him, and of course I told him so; but privately I did n't think he stood up to his duty as he ought. I said to him, however, that if he would give me his word of honor that he would not abandon Miss Bernardstone, there was no trouble I would n't take to be of use to him. I did n't think Lady Vandeleur was behaving well. He must allow me to repeat that; but if going to see her would give him any pleasure (of course there was no question of pleasure for *her*) I would go fifty times. I could n't imagine how it would help him, but I would do it as I would do anything else he asked me. He did n't give me his word of honor, but he said quietly, "*I* shall go straight; you need n't be afraid;" and as he spoke there was honor enough in his face. This left an

opening, of course, for another catastrophe. There might be further postponements, and poor Lady Emily, indignant for the first time in her life, might declare that her daughter's situation had become intolerable and that they withdrew from the engagement. But this was too odious a chance, and I accepted Mr. Tester's assurance. He told me that the good I could do by going to see Lady Vandeleur was that it would cheer her up, in that dreary, big house in Upper Brook Street, where she was absolutely alone, with horrible overalls on the furniture, and newspapers — actually newspapers — on the mirrors. She was seeing no one, there was no one to see; but he knew she would see me. I asked him if she knew, then, he was to speak to me of coming, and whether I might allude to him, whether it was not too delicate. I shall never forget his answer to this, nor the tone in which he made it, blushing a little, and looking away. "Allude to me? Rather!" It was not the most fatuous speech I had ever heard; it had the effect of being the most modest; and it gave me an odd idea, and especially a new one, of the condition in which, at any time, one might be destined to find Lady Vandeleur. If she, too, were engaged in a struggle with her conscience (in this light they were an edifying pair!) it had perhaps changed her considerably, made her more approachable; and I reflected, ingeniously, that it probably had a humanizing effect upon her. Ambrose Tester did n't go away after I had told him that I would comply with his

request. He lingered, fidgeting with his stick and gloves, and I perceived that he had more to tell me, and that the real reason why he wished me to go and see Lady Vandeleur was not that she had newspapers on her mirrors. He came out with it at last, for that "Rather!" of his (with the way I took it) had broken the ice.

"You say you don't think she behaves well" (he naturally wished to defend her). "But I dare say you don't understand her position. Perhaps you would n't behave any better in her place."

"It 's very good of you to imagine me there!" I remarked, laughing.

"It 's awkward for me to say. One does n't want to dot one's i's to that extent."

"She would be delighted to marry you. That 's not such a mystery."

"Well, she likes me awfully," Mr. Tester said, looking like a handsome child. "It 's not all on one side; it 's on both. That 's the difficulty."

"You mean she won't let you go? — she holds you fast?"

But the poor fellow had, in delicacy, said enough, and at this he jumped up. He stood there a moment, smoothing his hat; then he broke out again: "Please do this. Let her know — make her feel. You can bring it in, you know." And here he paused, embarrassed.

"What can I bring in, Mr. Tester? That 's the difficulty, as you say."

"What you told me the other day. You know. What you have told me before."

"What I have told you — ?"

"That it would put an end to Joscelind! If you can't work round to it, what's the good of being — you?" And with this tribute to my powers he took his departure.

## VII.

It was all very well of him to be so flattering, but I really did n't see myself talking in that manner to Lady Vandeleur. I wondered why he did n't give her this information himself, and what particular value it could have as coming from me. Then I said to myself that of course he *had* mentioned to her the truth I had impressed upon him (and which by this time he had evidently taken home), but that to enable it to produce its full effect upon Lady Vandeleur the further testimony of a witness more independent was required. There was nothing for me but to go and see her, and I went the next day, fully conscious that to execute Mr. Tester's commission I should have either to find myself very brave or to find her strangely confidential; and fully prepared, also, not to be admitted. But she received me, and the house in Upper Brook Street was as dismal as Ambrose Tester had represented it. The December fog (the afternoon was very dusky) seemed to pervade the muffled rooms, and her ladyship's pink lamplight to waste itself in the brown atmosphere. He had men-

tioned to me that the heir to the title (a cousin of her husband), who had left her unmolested for several months, was now taking possession of everything, so that what kept her in town was the business of her "turning out," and certain formalities connected with her dower. This was very ample, and the large provision made for her included the London house. She was very gracious on this occasion, but she certainly had remarkably little to say. Still, she was different, or at any rate (having taken that hint), I saw her differently. I saw, indeed, that I had never quite done her justice, that I had exaggerated her stiffness, attributed to her a kind of conscious grandeur which was in reality much more an accident of her appearance, of her figure, than a quality of her character. Her appearance is as grand as you know, and on the day I speak of, in her simplified mourning, under those vaguely gleaming *lambris*, she looked as beautiful as a great white lily. She is very simple and good-natured; she will never make an advance, but she will always respond to one, and I saw, that evening, that the way to get on with her was to treat her as if she were not too imposing. I saw also that, with her nun-like robes and languid eyes, she was a woman who might be immensely in love. All the same, we had n't much to say to each other. She remarked that it was very kind of me to come, that she wondered how I could endure London at that season, that she had taken a drive and found the Park too dreadful, that she would ring for some more tea if

I did n't like what she had given me. Our conversation wandered, stumbling a little, among these platitudes, but no allusion was made on either side to Ambrose Tester. Nevertheless, as I have said, she was different, though it was not till I got home that I phrased to myself what I had detected.

Then, recalling her white face, and the deeper, stranger expression of her beautiful eyes, I entertained myself with the idea that she was under the influence of "suppressed exaltation." The more I thought of her the more she appeared to me not natural; wound up, as it were, to a calmness beneath which there was a deal of agitation. This would have been nonsense if I had not, two days afterwards, received a note from her which struck me as an absolutely "exalted" production. Not superficially, of course; to the casual eye it would have been perfectly commonplace. But this was precisely its peculiarity, that Lady Vandeleur should have written me a note which had no apparent point save that she should like to see me again, a desire for which she did succeed in assigning a reason. She reminded me that she was paying no calls, and she hoped I would n't stand on ceremony, but come in very soon again, she had enjoyed my visit so much. We had not been on note-writing terms, and there was nothing in that visit to alter our relations; moreover, six months before, she would not have dreamed of addressing me in that way. I was doubly convinced, therefore, that she was passing

through a crisis, that she was not in her normal state of nerves. Mr. Tester had not reappeared since the occasion I have described at length, and I thought it possible he had been capable of the bravery of leaving town. I had, however, no fear of meeting him in Upper Brook Street; for, according to my theory of his relations with Lady Vandeleur, he regularly spent his evenings with her, it being clear to me that they must dine together. I could answer her note only by going to see her the next day, when I found abundant confirmation of that idea about the crisis. I must confess to you in advance that I have never really understood her behavior, — never understood why she should have taken me so suddenly — with whatever reserves, and however much by implication merely — into her confidence. All I can say is that this is an accident to which one is exposed with English people, who, in my opinion, and contrary to common report, are the most demonstrative, the most expansive, the most gushing in the world. I think she felt rather isolated at this moment, and she had never had many intimates of her own sex. That sex, as a general thing, disapproved of her proceedings during the last few months, held that she was making Joscelind Bernardstone suffer too cruelly. She possibly felt the weight of this censure, and at all events was not above wishing some one to know that whatever injury had fallen upon the girl to whom Mr. Tester had so stupidly engaged himself,

had not, so far as she was concerned, been wantonly inflicted. I was there, I was more or less aware of her situation, and I would do as well as any one else.

She seemed really glad to see me, but she was very nervous. Nevertheless, nearly half an hour elapsed, and I was still wondering whether she had sent for me only to discuss the question of how a London house whose appointments had the stamp of a debased period (it had been thought very handsome in 1850) could be "done up" without being made æsthetic. I forget what satisfaction I gave her on this point; I was asking myself how I could work round in the manner prescribed by Joscelind's intended. At the last, however, to my extreme surprise, Lady Vandeleur herself relieved me of this effort.

"I think you know Mr. Tester rather well," she remarked, abruptly, irrelevantly, and with a face more conscious of the bearings of things than any I had ever seen her wear. On my confessing to such an acquaintance, she mentioned that Mr. Tester (who had been in London a few days — perhaps I had seen him) had left town and would n't come back for several weeks. This, for the moment, seemed to be all she had to communicate; but she sat looking at me from the corner of her sofa as if she wished me to profit in some way by the opportunity she had given me. Did she want help from outside, this proud, inscrutable woman, and was she reduced to throwing

out signals of distress? Did she wish to be protected against herself, — applauded for such efforts as she had already made? I did n't rush forward, I was not precipitate, for I felt that now, surely, I should be able at my convenience to execute my commission. What concerned me was not to prevent Lady Vandeleur's marrying Mr. Tester, but to prevent Mr. Tester's marrying her. In a few moments — with the same irrelevance — she announced to me that he wished to, and asked whether I did n't know it. I saw that this was my chance, and instantly, with extreme energy, I exclaimed, —

"Ah, for Heaven's sake don't listen to him! It would kill Miss Bernardstone!"

The tone of my voice made her color a little, and she repeated, "Miss Bernardstone?"

"The girl he is engaged to, — or has been, — don't you know? Excuse me, I thought every one knew."

"Of course I know he is dreadfully entangled. He was fairly hunted down." Lady Vandeleur was silent a moment, and then she added, with a strange smile, "Fancy, in such a situation, his wanting to marry me!"

"Fancy!" I replied. I was so struck with the oddity of her telling me her secrets that for the moment my indignation did not come to a head, — my indignation, I mean, at her accusing poor Lady Emily (and even the girl herself) of having "trapped" our friend. Later I said to myself that I supposed

she was within her literal right in abusing her rival, if she was trying sincerely to give him up. "I don't know anything about his having been hunted down," I said; "but this I do know, Lady Vandeleur, I assure you, that if he should throw Joscelind over she would simply go out like that!" And I snapped my fingers.

Lady Vandeleur listened to this serenely enough; she tried at least to take the air of a woman who has no need of new arguments. "Do you know her very well?" she asked, as if she had been struck by my calling Miss Bernardstone by her Christian name.

"Well enough to like her very much." I was going to say "to pity her;" but I thought better of it.

"She must be a person of very little spirit. If a man were to jilt me, I don't think I should go out!" cried her ladyship with a laugh.

"Nothing is more probable than that she has not your courage or your wisdom. She may be weak, but she is passionately in love with him."

I looked straight into Lady Vandeleur's eyes as I said this, and I was conscious that it was a tolerably good description of my hostess.

"Do you think she would really die?" she asked in a moment.

"Die as if one should stab her with a knife. Some people don't believe in broken hearts," I continued. "I did n't till I knew Joscelind Bernardstone; then I felt that she had one that would n't be proof."

"One ought to live, — one ought always to live," said Lady Vandeleur; "and always to hold up one's head."

"Ah, I suppose that one ought n't to feel at all, if one wishes to be a great success."

"What do you call a great success?" she asked.

"Never having occasion to be pitied."

"Being pitied? That must be odious!" she said; and I saw that though she might wish for admiration, she would never wish for sympathy. Then, in a moment, she added that men, in her opinion, were very base, — a remark that was deep, but not, I think, very honest; that is, in so far as the purpose of it had been to give me the idea that Ambrose Tester had done nothing but press her, and she had done nothing but resist. They were very odd, the discrepancies in the statements of each of this pair; but it must be said for Lady Vandeleur that now that she had made up her mind (as I believed she had) to sacrifice herself, she really persuaded herself that she had not had a moment of weakness. She quite unbosomed herself, and I fairly assisted at her crisis. It appears that she had a conscience, — very much so, and even a high ideal of duty. She represented herself as moving heaven and earth to keep Ambrose Tester up to the mark, and you would never have guessed from what she told me that she had entertained ever so faintly the idea of marrying him. I am sure this was a dreadful perversion, but I forgave it on the score of that exaltation of which I have

spoken. The things she said, and the way she said them, come back to me, and I thought that if she looked as handsome as that when she preached virtue to Mr. Tester, it was no wonder he liked the sermon to be going on perpetually.

"I dare say you know what old friends we are; but that does n't make any difference, does it? Nothing would induce me to marry him, — I have n't the smallest intention of marrying again. It is not a time for me to think of marrying, before his lordship has been dead six months. The girl is nothing to me; I know nothing about her, and I don't wish to know; but I should be very, very sorry if she were unhappy. He is the best friend I ever had, but I don't see that that 's any reason I should marry him, do you?" Lady Vandeleur appealed to me, but without waiting for my answers, asking advice in spite of herself, and then remembering it was beneath her dignity to appear to be in need of it. "I have told him that if he does n't act properly I shall never speak to him again. She 's a charming girl, every one says, and I have no doubt she will make him perfectly happy. Men don't feel things like women, I think, and if they are coddled and flattered they forget the rest. I have no doubt she is very sufficient for all that. For me, at any rate, once I see a thing in a certain way, I must abide by that. I think people are so dreadful, — they do such horrible things. They don't seem to think what one's duty may be. I don't know whether you think much

about that, but really one must at times, don't you think so? Every one is so selfish, and then, when they have never made an effort or a sacrifice themselves, they come to you and talk such a lot of hypocrisy. I know so much better than any one else whether I should marry or not. But I don't mind telling you that I don't see why I should. I am not in such a bad position, — with my liberty and a decent maintenance."

In this manner she rambled on, gravely and communicatively, contradicting herself at times; not talking fast (she never did), but dropping one simple sentence, with an interval, after the other, with a certain richness of voice which always was part of the charm of her presence. She wished to be convinced against herself, and it was a comfort to her to hear herself argue. I was quite willing to be part of the audience, though I had to confine myself to very superficial remarks; for when I had said the event I feared would kill Miss Bernardstone I had said everything that was open to me. I had nothing to do with Lady Vandeleur's marrying, apart from that. I probably disappointed her. She had caught a glimpse of the moral beauty of self-sacrifice, of a certain ideal of conduct (I imagine it was rather new to her), and would have been glad to elicit from me, as a person of some experience of life, an assurance that such joys are not insubstantial. I had no wish to wind her up to a spiritual ecstasy from which she would inevitably descend again, and I let her deliver

herself according to her humor, without attempting to answer for it that she would find renunciation the road to bliss. I believed that if she should give up Mr. Tester she would suffer accordingly; but I did n't think that a reason for not giving him up. Before I left her she said to me that nothing would induce her to do anything that she did n't think right. "It would be no pleasure to me, don't you see? I should be always thinking that another way would have been better. Nothing would induce me, — nothing, nothing!"

## VIII.

SHE protested too much, perhaps, but the event seemed to show that she was in earnest. I have described these two first visits of mine in some detail, but they were not the only ones I paid her. I saw her several times again, before she left town, and we became intimate, as London intimacies are measured. She ceased to protest (to my relief, for it made me nervous), she was very gentle, and gracious, and reasonable, and there was something in the way she looked and spoke that told me that for the present she found renunciation its own reward. So far, my scepticism was put to shame; her spiritual ecstasy maintained itself. If I could have foreseen then that it would maintain itself till the present hour I should have felt that Lady Vandeleur's moral nature is finer indeed than mine. I heard from her that Mr. Tester remained at his father's, and that

Lady Emily and her daughter were also there. The day for the wedding had been fixed, and the preparations were going rapidly forward. Meanwhile — she did n't tell me, but I gathered it from things she dropped — she was in almost daily correspondence with the young man. I thought this a strange concomitant of his bridal arrangements; but apparently, henceforth, they were bent on convincing each other that the torch of virtue lighted their steps, and they could n't convince each other too much. She intimated to me that she had now effectually persuaded him (always by letter) that he would fail terribly if he should try to found his happiness on an injury done to another, and that of course she could never be happy (in a union with him), with the sight of his wretchedness before her. That a good deal of correspondence should be required to elucidate this is perhaps after all not remarkable. One day, when I was sitting with her (it was just before she left town), she suddenly burst into tears. Before we parted I said to her that there were several women in London I liked very much, — that was common enough, — but for her I had a positive respect, and that was rare. My respect continues still, and it sometimes makes me furious.

About the middle of January Ambrose Tester reappeared in town. He told me he came to bid me good-by. He was going to be beheaded. It was no use saying that old relations would be the same after a man was married; they would be different,

everything would be different. I had wanted him to marry, and now I should see how I liked it. He didn't mention that I had also wanted him not to marry, and I was sure that if Lady Vandeleur had become his wife, she would have been a much greater impediment to our harmless friendship than Joscelind Bernardstone would ever be. It took me but a short time to observe that he was in very much the same condition as Lady Vandeleur. He was finding how sweet it is to renounce, hand in hand with one we love. Upon him, too, the peace of the Lord had descended. He spoke of his father's delight at the nuptials being so near at hand; at the festivities that would take place in Dorsetshire when he should bring home his bride. The only allusion he made to what we had talked of the last time we were together was to exclaim suddenly, "How can I tell you how easy she has made it? She is so sweet, so noble. She really is a perfect creature!" I took for granted that he was talking of his future wife, but in a moment, as we were at cross-purposes, perceived that he meant Lady Vandeleur. This seemed to me really ominous. It stuck in my mind after he had left me. I was half tempted to write him a note, to say, "There is, after all, perhaps, something worse than your jilting Miss Bernardstone would be; and that is the danger that your rupture with Lady Vandeleur may become more of a bond than your marrying her would have been. For Heaven's sake, let your sacrifice *be* a sacrifice; keep it in its proper place!"

Of course I did n't write; even the slight responsibility I had already incurred began to frighten me, and I never saw Mr. Tester again till he was the husband of Joscelind Bernardstone. They have now been married some four years; they have two children, the eldest of whom is, as he should be, a boy. Sir Edmund waited till his grandson had made good his place in the world, and then, feeling it was safe, he quietly, genially surrendered his trust. He died, holding the hand of his daughter-in-law, and giving it doubtless a pressure which was an injunction to be brave. I don't know what he thought of the success of his plan for his son; but perhaps, after all, he saw nothing amiss, for Joscelind is the last woman in the world to have troubled him with her sorrows. From him, no doubt, she successfully concealed that bewilderment on which I have touched. You see I speak of her sorrows as if they were a matter of common recognition; certain it is that any one who meets her must see that she does n't pass her life in joy. Lady Vandeleur, as you know, has never married again; she is still the most beautiful widow in England. She enjoys the esteem of every one, as well as the approbation of her conscience, for every one knows the sacrifice she made, knows that she was even more in love with Sir Ambrose than he was with her. She goes out again, of course, as of old, and she constantly meets the baronet and his wife. She is supposed to be even "very nice" to Lady Tester, and she certainly treats her with exceeding

civility. But you know (or perhaps you don't know) all the deadly things that, in London, may lie beneath that method. I don't in the least mean that Lady Vandeleur has any deadly intentions; she is a very good woman, and I am sure that in her heart she thinks she lets poor Joscelind off very easily. But the result of the whole situation is that Joscelind is in dreadful fear of her, for how can she help seeing that she has a very peculiar power over her husband? There could n't have been a better occasion for observing the three together (if together it may be called, when Lady Tester is so completely outside), than those two days of ours at Doubleton. That 's a house where they have met more than once before; I think she and Sir Ambrose like it. By "she" I mean, as he used to mean, Lady Vandeleur. You saw how Lady Tester was absolutely white with uneasiness. What can she do when she meets everywhere the implication that if two people in our time have distinguished themselves for their virtue, it is her husband and Lady Vandeleur? It is my impression that this pair are exceedingly happy. His marriage *has* made a difference, and I see him much less frequently and less intimately. But when I meet him I notice in him a kind of emanation of quiet bliss. Yes, they are certainly in felicity, they have trod the clouds together, they have soared into the blue, and they wear in their faces the glory of those altitudes. They encourage, they cheer, inspire, sustain, each other, remind each other that they

have chosen the better part. Of course they have to meet for this purpose, and their interviews are filled, I am sure, with its sanctity. He holds up his head, as a man may who on a very critical occasion behaved like a perfect gentleman. It is only poor Joscelind that droops. Have n't I explained to you now why she does n't understand ?

# FOUR MEETINGS.

# FOUR MEETINGS.

I SAW her only four times, but I remember them vividly; she made an impression upon me. I thought her very pretty and very interesting, — a charming specimen of a type. I am very sorry to hear of her death; and yet, when I think of it, why should I be sorry? The last time I saw her she was certainly not — But I will describe all our meetings in order.

## I.

THE first one took place in the country, at a little tea-party, one snowy night. It must have been some seventeen years ago. My friend Latouche, going to spend Christmas with his mother, had persuaded me to go with him, and the good lady had given in our honor the entertainment of which I speak. To me it was really entertaining; I had never been in the depths of New England at that season. It had been snowing all day, and the drifts were knee-high. I wondered how the ladies had made their way to the

house; but I perceived that at Grimwinter a conversazione offering the attraction of two gentlemen from New York was felt to be worth an effort.

Mrs. Latouche, in the course of the evening, asked me if I "did n't want to" show the photographs to some of the young ladies. The photographs were in a couple of great portfolios, and had been brought home by her son, who, like myself, was lately returned from Europe. I looked round and was struck with the fact that most of the young ladies were provided with an object of interest more absorbing than the most vivid sun-picture. But there was a person standing alone near the mantel-shelf, and looking round the room with a small gentle smile which seemed at odds, somehow, with her isolation. I looked at her a moment, and then said, "I should like to show them to that young lady."

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Latouche, "she is just the person. She does n't care for flirting; I will speak to her."

I rejoined that if she did not care for flirting, she was, perhaps, not just the person; but Mrs. Latouche had already gone to propose the photographs to her.

"She 's delighted," she said, coming back. "She is just the person, so quiet and so bright." And then she told me the young lady was, by name, Miss Caroline Spencer, and with this she introduced me.

Miss Caroline Spencer was not exactly a beauty, but she was a charming little figure. She must have been close upon thirty, but she was made almost like

a little girl, and she had the complexion of a child. She had a very pretty head, and her hair was arranged as nearly as possible like the hair of a Greek bust, though indeed it was to be doubted if she had ever seen a Greek bust. She was "artistic," I suspected, so far as Grimwinter allowed such tendencies. She had a soft, surprised eye, and thin lips, with very pretty teeth. Round her neck she wore what ladies call, I believe, a "ruche," fastened with a very small pin in pink coral, and in her hand she carried a fan made of plaited straw and adorned with pink ribbon. She wore a scanty black silk dress. She spoke with a kind of soft precision, showing her white teeth between her narrow but tender-looking lips, and she seemed extremely pleased, even a little fluttered, at the prospect of my demonstrations. These went forward very smoothly, after I had moved the portfolios out of their corner and placed a couple of chairs near a lamp. The photographs were usually things I knew, — large views of Switzerland, Italy, and Spain, landscapes, copies of famous buildings, pictures, and statues. I said what I could about them, and my companion, looking at them as I held them up, sat perfectly still, with her straw fan raised to her under-lip. Occasionally, as I laid one of the pictures down, she said very softly, "Have you seen that place?" I usually answered that I had seen it several times (I had been a great traveller), and then I felt that she looked at me askance for a moment with her pretty eyes. I had asked her

at the outset whether she had been to Europe; to this she answered, "No, no, no," in a little quick, confidential whisper. But after that, though she never took her eyes off the pictures, she said so little that I was afraid she was bored. Accordingly, after we had finished one portfolio, I offered, if she desired it, to desist. I felt that she was not bored, but her reticence puzzled me, and I wished to make her speak. I turned round to look at her, and saw that there was a faint flush in each of her cheeks. She was waving her little fan to and fro. Instead of looking at me she fixed her eyes upon the other portfolio, which was leaning against the table.

"Won't you show me that?" she asked, with a little tremor in her voice. I could almost have believed she was agitated.

"With pleasure," I answered, "if you are not tired."

"No, I am not tired," she affirmed. "I like it—I love it."

And as I took up the other portfolio she laid her hand upon it, rubbing it softly.

"And have you been here too?" she asked.

On my opening the portfolio it appeared that I had been there. One of the first photographs was a large view of the Castle of Chillon, on the Lake of Geneva.

"Here," I said, "I have been many a time. Is it not beautiful?" And I pointed to the perfect reflection of the rugged rocks and pointed towers in the clear still water. She did not say, "Oh, enchanting!" and push it away to see the next picture. She looked

awhile, and then she asked if it was not where Bonnivard, about whom Byron wrote, was confined. I assented, and tried to quote some of Byron's verses, but in this attempt I succeeded imperfectly.

She fanned herself a moment, and then repeated the lines correctly, in a soft, flat, and yet agreeable voice. By the time she had finished she was blushing. I complimented her and told her she was perfectly equipped for visiting Switzerland and Italy. She looked at me askance again, to see whether I was serious, and I added, that if she wished to recognize Byron's descriptions she must go abroad speedily; Europe was getting sadly dis-Byronized.

"How soon must I go?" she asked.

"Oh, I will give you ten years."

"I think I can go within ten years," she answered very soberly.

"Well," I said, "you will enjoy it immensely; you will find it very charming." And just then I came upon a photograph of some nook in a foreign city which I had been very fond of, and which recalled tender memories. I discoursed (as I suppose) with a certain eloquence; my companion sat listening, breathless.

"Have you been *very* long in foreign lands?" she asked, some time after I had ceased.

"Many years," I said.

"And have you travelled everywhere?"

"I have travelled a great deal. I am very fond of it; and, happily, I have been able."

Again she gave me her sidelong gaze. "And do you know the foreign languages?"

"After a fashion."

"Is it hard to speak them?"

"I don't believe you would find it hard," I gallantly responded.

"Oh, I shouldn't want to speak; I should only want to listen," she said. Then, after a pause, she added, "They say the French theatre is so beautiful."

"It is the best in the world."

"Did you go there very often?"

"When I was first in Paris I went every night."

"Every night!" And she opened her clear eyes very wide. "That to me is —" and she hesitated a moment — "is very wonderful." A few minutes later she asked, "Which country do you prefer?"

"There is one country I prefer to all others. I think you would do the same."

She looked at me a moment, and then she said softly, "Italy?"

"Italy," I answered softly, too; and for a moment we looked at each other. She looked as pretty as if, instead of showing her photographs, I had been making love to her. To increase the analogy, she glanced away, blushing. There was a silence, which she broke at last by saying,—

"That is the place which, in particular, I thought of going to."

"Oh, that's the place, that's the place!" I said.

She looked at two or three photographs in silence. "They say it is not so dear."

"As some other countries? Yes, that is not the least of its charms."

"But it is all very dear, is it not?"

"Europe, you mean?"

"Going there and travelling. That has been the trouble. I have very little money. I give lessons," said Miss Spencer.

"Of course one must have money," I said, "but one can manage with a moderate amount."

"I think I should manage. I have laid something by, and I am always adding a little to it. It's all for that." She paused a moment, and then went on with a kind of suppressed eagerness, as if telling me the story were a rare, but a possibly impure satisfaction. "But it has not been only the money; it has been everything. Everything has been against it. I have waited and waited. It has been a mere castle in the air. I am almost afraid to talk about it. Two or three times it has been a little nearer, and then I have talked about it and it has melted away. I have talked about it too much," she said hypocritically; for I saw that such talking was now a small tremulous ecstasy. "There is a lady who is a great friend of mine; she does n't want to go; I always talk to her about it. I tire her dreadfully. She told me once she did n't know what would become of me. I should go crazy if I did not go to Europe, and I should certainly go crazy if I did."

"Well," I said, "you have not gone yet, and nevertheless you are not crazy."

She looked at me a moment, and said, "I am not so sure. I don't think of anything else. I am always thinking of it. It prevents me from thinking of things that are nearer home, things that I ought to attend to. That is a kind of craziness."

"The cure for it is to go," I said.

"I have a faith that I shall go. I have a cousin in Europe!" she announced.

We turned over some more photographs, and I asked her if she had always lived at Grimwinter.

"Oh, no, sir," said Miss Spencer. "I have spent twenty-three months in Boston."

I answered, jocosely, that in that case foreign lands would probably prove a disappointment to her; but I quite failed to alarm her.

"I know more about them than you might think," she said, with her shy, neat little smile. "I mean by reading; I have read a great deal. I have not only read Byron; I have read histories and guide-books. I know I shall like it "

"I understand your case," I rejoined. "You have the native American passion,— the passion for the picturesque. With us, I think it is primordial,— antecedent to experience. Experience comes and only shows us something we have dreamt of."

"I think that is very true," said Caroline Spencer. "I have dreamt of everything; I shall know it all!"

"I am afraid you have wasted a great deal of time."

"Oh, yes, that has been my great wickedness."

The people about us had begun to scatter; they were taking their leave. She got up and put out her hand to me, timidly, but with a peculiar brightness in her eyes.

"I am going back there," I said, as I shook hands with her. "I shall look out for you."

"I will tell you," she answered, "if I am disappointed."

And she went away, looking delicately agitated, and moving her little straw fan.

## II.

A FEW months after this I returned to Europe, and some three years elapsed. I had been living in Paris, and, toward the end of October, I went from that city to Havre, to meet my sister and her husband, who had written me that they were about to arrive there. On reaching Havre I found that the steamer was already in; I was nearly two hours late. I repaired directly to the hotel, where my relatives were already established. My sister had gone to bed, exhausted and disabled by her voyage; she was a sadly incompetent sailor, and her sufferings on this occasion had been extreme. She wished, for the moment, for undisturbed rest, and was unable to see me more than five minutes; so it was agreed that we should remain at Havre until the next day. My brother-in-law, who was anxious about his wife, was unwilling to leave her room; but she insisted upon

his going out with me to take a walk and recover his land-legs. The early autumn day was warm and charming, and our stroll through the bright-colored, busy streets of the old French seaport was sufficiently entertaining. We walked along the sunny, noisy quays, and then turned into a wide, pleasant street, which lay half in sun and half in shade — a French provincial street, that looked like an old water-color drawing: tall, gray, steep-roofed, red-gabled, many-storied houses; green shutters on windows and old scroll-work above them; flower-pots in balconies, and white-capped women in doorways. We walked in the shade; all this stretched away on the sunny side of the street and made a picture. We looked at it as we passed along; then, suddenly, my brother-in-law stopped, pressing my arm and staring. I followed his gazè and saw that we had paused just before coming to a *café*, where, under an awning, several tables and chairs were disposed upon the pavement. The windows were open behind; half a dozen plants in tubs were ranged beside the door; the pavement was besprinkled with clean bran. It was a nice little, quiet, old-fashioned *café;* inside, in the comparative dusk, I saw a stout, handsome woman, with pink ribbons in her cap, perched up with a mirror behind her back, smiling at some one who was out of sight. All this, however, I perceived afterwards; what I first observed was a lady sitting alone, outside, at one of the little marble-topped tables. My brother-in-law had stopped to look at her. There

was something on the little table, but she was leaning back quietly, with her hands folded, looking down the street, away from us. I saw her only in something less than profile; nevertheless, I instantly felt that I had seen her before.

"The little lady of the steamer!" exclaimed my brother-in-law.

"Was she on your steamer?" I asked.

"From morning till night. She was never sick. She used to sit perpetually at the side of the vessel with her hands crossed that way, looking at the eastward horizon."

"Are you going to speak to her?"

"I don't know her. I never made acquaintance with her. I was too seedy. But I used to watch her and — I don't know why — to be interested in her. She 's a dear little Yankee woman. I have an idea she is a schoolmistress taking a holiday, for which her scholars have made up a purse."

She turned her face a little more into profile, looking at the steep gray house-fronts opposite to her. Then I said, "I shall speak to her myself."

"I would n't; she is very shy," said my brother-in-law.

"My dear fellow, I know her. I once showed her photographs at a tea-party."

And I went up to her. She turned and looked at me, and I saw she was in fact Miss Caroline Spencer. But she was not so quick to recognize me; she looked startled. I pushed a chair to the table and sat down.

"Well," I said, "I hope you are not disappointed!"

She stared, blushing a little; then she gave a small jump which betrayed recognition.

"It was you who showed me the photographs, at Grimwinter!"

"Yes, it was I. This happens very charmingly, for I feel as if it were for me to give you a formal reception here, an official welcome. I talked to you so much about Europe."

"You did n't say too much. I am so happy!" she softly exclaimed.

Very happy she looked. There was no sign of her being older; she was as gravely, decently, demurely pretty as before. If she had seemed before a thin-stemmed, mild-hued flower of Puritanism, it may be imagined whether in her present situation this delicate bloom was less apparent. Beside her an old gentleman was drinking absinthe; behind her the *dame de comptoir* in the pink ribbons was calling "Alcibiade! Alcibiade!" to the long-aproned waiter. I explained to Miss Spencer that my companion had lately been her shipmate, and my brother-in-law came up and was introduced to her. But she looked at him as if she had never seen him before, and I remembered that he had told me that her eyes were always fixed upon the eastward horizon. She had evidently not noticed him, and, still timidly smiling, she made no attempt whatever to pretend that she had. I stayed with her at the *café* door, and he went back to the hotel and to his wife. I said to Miss

Spencer that this meeting of ours in the first hour of her landing was really very strange, but that I was delighted to be there and receive her first impressions.

"Oh, I can't tell you," she said; "I feel as if I were in a dream. I have been sitting here for an hour, and I don't want to move. Everything is so picturesque. I don't know whether the coffee has intoxicated me; it 's so delicious."

"Really," said I, "if you are so pleased with this poor prosaic Havre, you will have no admiration left for better things. Don't spend your admiration all the first day; remember it 's your intellectual letter of credit. Remember all the beautiful places and things that are waiting for you; remember that lovely Italy!"

"I 'm not afraid of running short," she said gayly, still looking at the opposite houses. "I could sit here all day, saying to myself that here I am at last. It 's so dark and old and different."

"By the way," I inquired, "how come you to be sitting here? Have you not gone to one of the inns?" For I was half amused, half alarmed, at the good conscience with which this delicately pretty woman had stationed herself in conspicuous isolation on the edge of the *trottoir*.

"My cousin brought me here," she answered. "You know I told you I had a cousin in Europe. He met me at the steamer this morning."

"It was hardly worth his while to meet you if he was to desert you so soon."

"Oh, he has only left me for half an hour," said Miss Spencer. "He has gone to get my money."

"Where is your money?"

She gave a little laugh. "It makes me feel very fine to tell you! It is in some circular notes."

"And where are your circular notes?"

"In my cousin's pocket."

This statement was very serenely uttered, but — I can hardly say why — it gave me a sensible chill. At the moment I should have been utterly unable to give the reason of this sensation, for I knew nothing of Miss Spencer's cousin. Since he was her cousin, the presumption was in his favor. But I felt suddenly uncomfortable at the thought that, half an hour after her landing, her scanty funds should have passed into his hands.

"Is he to travel with you?" I asked.

"Only as far as Paris. He is an art-student, in Paris. I wrote to him that I was coming, but I never expected him to come off to the ship. I supposed he would only just meet me at the train in Paris. It is very kind of him. But he *is* very kind, and very bright."

I instantly became conscious of an extreme curiosity to see this bright cousin who was an art-student.

"He is gone to the banker's?" I asked.

"Yes, to the banker's. He took me to a hotel, such a queer, quaint, delicious little place, with a court in the middle, and a gallery all round, and a lovely landlady, in such a beautifully fluted cap, and

such a perfectly fitting dress! After a while we came out to walk to the banker's, for I have n't got any French money. But I was very dizzy from the motion of the vessel, and I thought I had better sit down. He found this place for me here, and he went off to the banker's himself. I am to wait here till he comes back."

It may seem very fantastic, but it passed through my mind that he would never come back. I settled myself in my chair beside Miss Spencer and determined to await the event. She was extremely observant; there was something touching in it. She noticed everything that the movement of the street brought before us, — peculiarities of costume, the shapes of vehicles, the big Norman horses, the fat priests, the shaven poodles. We talked of these things, and there was something charming in her freshness of perception and the way her book-nourished fancy recognized and welcomed everything.

"And when your cousin comes back, what are you going to do?" I asked.

She hesitated a moment. "We don't quite know."

"When do you go to Paris? If you go by the four o'clock train, I may have the pleasure of making the journey with you."

"I don't think we shall do that. My cousin thinks I had better stay here a few days."

"Oh!" said I; and for five minutes said nothing more. I was wondering what her cousin was, in vulgar parlance, "up to." I looked up and down the

street, but saw nothing that looked like a bright American art-student. At last I took the liberty of observing that Havre was hardly a place to choose as one of the æsthetic stations of a European tour. It was a place of convenience, nothing more; a place of transit, through which transit should be rapid. I recommended her to go to Paris by the afternoon train, and meanwhile to amuse herself by driving to the ancient fortress at the mouth of the harbor,—that picturesque circular structure which bore the name of Francis the First, and looked like a small castle of St. Angelo. (It has lately been demolished.)

She listened with much interest; then for a moment she looked grave.

"My cousin told me that when he returned he should have something particular to say to me, and that we could do nothing or decide nothing until I should have heard it. But I will make him tell me quickly, and then we will go to the ancient fortress. There is no hurry to get to Paris; there is plenty of time."

She smiled with her softly severe little lips as she spoke those last words. But I, looking at her with a purpose, saw just a tiny gleam of apprehension in her eye.

"Don't tell me," I said, "that this wretched man is going to give you bad news!"

"I suspect it is a little bad, but I don't believe it is very bad. At any rate, I must listen to it."

I looked at her again an instant. "You didn't

come to Europe to listen," I said. "You came to see!" But now I was sure her cousin would come back; since he had something disagreeable to say to her, he certainly would turn up. We sat a while longer, and I asked her about her plans of travel. She had them on her fingers' ends, and she told over the names with a kind of solemn distinctness: from Paris to Dijon and to Avignon, from Avignon to Marseilles and the Cornice road; thence to Genoa, to Spezia, to Pisa, to Florence, to Rome. It apparently had never occurred to her that there could be the least incommodity in her travelling alone; and since she was unprovided with a companion I of course scrupulously abstained from disturbing her sense of security.

At last her cousin came back. I saw him turn towards us out of a side street, and from the moment my eyes rested upon him I felt that this was the bright American art-student. He wore a slouch hat and a rusty black velvet jacket, such as I had often encountered in the Rue Bonaparte. His shirt-collar revealed the elongation of a throat which, at a distance, was not strikingly statuesque. He was tall and lean; he had red hair and freckles. So much I had time to observe while he approached the *café*, staring at me with natural surprise from under his umbrageous coiffure. When he came up to us I immediately introduced myself to him as an old acquaintance of Miss Spencer. He looked at me hard with a pair of little red eyes, then he made me a solemn bow in the French fashion, with his sombrero.

"You were not on the ship?" he said.

"No, I was not on the ship. I have been in Europe these three years."

He bowed once more, solemnly, and motioned me to be seated again. I sat down, but it was only for the purpose of observing him an instant; I saw it was time I should return to my sister. Miss Spencer's cousin was a queer fellow. Nature had not shaped him for a Raphaelesque or Byronic attire, and his velvet doublet and naked neck were not in harmony with his facial attributes. His hair was cropped close to his head; his ears were large and ill-adjusted to the same. He had a lackadaisical carriage and a sentimental droop which were peculiarly at variance with his keen, strange-colored eyes. Perhaps I was prejudiced, but I thought his eyes treacherous. He said nothing for some time; he leaned his hands on his cane and looked up and down the street. Then at last, slowly lifting his cane and pointing with it, "That's a very nice bit," he remarked, softly. He had his head on one side, and his little eyes were half closed. I followed the direction of his stick; the object it indicated was a red cloth hung out of an old window. "Nice bit of color," he continued; and without moving his head he transferred his half-closed gaze to me. "Composes well," he pursued. "Make a nice thing." He spoke in a hard vulgar voice.

"I see you have a great deal of eye," I replied. "Your cousin tells me you are studying art." He looked at me in the same way without answering,

and I went on with deliberate urbanity, "I suppose you are at the studio of one of those great men."

Still he looked at me, and then he said softly, "Gérôme."

"Do you like it?" I asked.

"Do you understand French?" he said.

"Some kinds," I answered.

He kept his little eyes on me; then he said, "J'adore la peinture!"

"Oh, I understand that kind!" I rejoined. Miss Spencer laid her hand upon her cousin's arm with a little pleased and fluttered movement; it was delightful to be among people who were on such easy terms with foreign tongues. I got up to take leave, and asked Miss Spencer where, in Paris, I might have the honor of waiting upon her. To what hotel would she go?

She turned to her cousin inquiringly, and he honored me again with his little languid leer. "Do you know the Hôtel des Princes?"

"I know where it is."

"I shall take her there."

"I congratulate you," I said to Caroline Spencer. "I believe it is the best inn in the world; and in case I should still have a moment to call upon you here, where are you lodged?"

"Oh, it's such a pretty name," said Miss Spencer gleefully. "À la Belle Normande."

As I left them her cousin gave me a great flourish with his picturesque hat.

## III.

My sister, as it proved, was not sufficiently restored to leave Havre by the afternoon train; so that, as the autumn dusk began to fall, I found myself at liberty to call at the sign of the Fair Norman. I must confess that I had spent much of the interval in wondering what the disagreeable thing was that my charming friend's disagreeable cousin had been telling her. The "Belle Normande" was a modest inn in a shady by-street, where it gave me satisfaction to think Miss Spencer must have encountered local color in abundance. There was a crooked little court, where much of the hospitality of the house was carried on; there was a staircase climbing to bedrooms on the outer side of the wall; there was a small trickling fountain with a stucco statuette in the midst of it; there was a little boy in a white cap and apron cleaning copper vessels at a conspicuous kitchen door; there was a chattering landlady, neatly laced, arranging apricots and grapes into an artistic pyramid upon a pink plate. I looked about, and on a green bench outside of an open door labelled *Salle à Manger*, I perceived Caroline Spencer. No sooner had I looked at her than I saw that something had happened since the morning. She was leaning back on her bench, her hands were clasped in her lap, and her eyes were fixed upon the landlady, at the other side of the court, manipulating her apricots.

But I saw she was not thinking of apricots. She was staring absently, thoughtfully; as I came near her I perceived that she had been crying. I sat down on the bench beside her before she saw me; then, when she had done so, she simply turned round, without surprise, and rested her sad eyes upon me. Something very bad indeed had happened; she was completely changed.

I immediately charged her with it. "Your cousin has been giving you bad news; you are in great distress."

For a moment she said nothing, and I supposed that she was afraid to speak, lest her tears should come back. But presently I perceived that in the short time that had elapsed since my leaving her in the morning she had shed them all, and that she was now softly stoical, intensely composed.

"My poor cousin is in distress," she said at last. "His news was bad." Then, after a brief hesitation, "He was in terrible want of money."

"In want of yours, you mean?"

"Of any that he could get — honestly. Mine was the only money."

"And he has taken yours?"

She hesitated again a moment, but her glance, meanwhile, was pleading. "I gave him what I had."

I have always remembered the accent of those words as the most angelic bit of human utterance I had ever listened to; but then, almost with a sense of personal outrage, I jumped up. "Good heavens!" I said, "do you call that getting it honestly?"

I had gone too far; she blushed deeply. "We will not speak of it," she said.

"We *must* speak of it," I answered, sitting down again. "I am your friend; it seems to me you need one. What is the matter with your cousin?"

"He is in debt."

"No doubt! But what is the special fitness of your paying his debts?"

"He has told me all his story; I am very sorry for him."

"So am I! But I hope he will give you back your money."

"Certainly he will; as soon as he can."

"When will that be?"

"When he has finished his great picture."

"My dear young lady, confound his great picture! Where is this desperate cousin?"

She certainly hesitated now. Then,—"At his dinner," she answered.

I turned about and looked through the open door into the *salle à manger*. There, alone at the end of a long table, I perceived the object of Miss Spencer's compassion, the bright young art-student. He was dining too attentively to notice me at first; but in the act of setting down a well-emptied wine-glass he caught sight of my observant attitude. He paused in his repast, and, with his head on one side and his meagre jaws slowly moving, fixedly returned my gaze. Then the landlady came lightly brushing by with her pyramid of apricots.

"And that nice little plate of fruit is for him?" I exclaimed.

Miss Spencer glanced at it tenderly. "They do that so prettily!" she murmured.

I felt helpless and irritated. "Come now, really," I said; "do you approve of that long strong fellow accepting your funds?" She looked away from me; I was evidently giving her pain. The case was hopeless; the long strong fellow had "interested" her.

"Excuse me if I speak of him so unceremoniously," I said. "But you are really too generous, and he is not quite delicate enough. He made his debts himself; he ought to pay them himself."

"He has been foolish," she answered; "I know that. He has told me everything. We had a long talk this morning; the poor fellow threw himself upon my charity. He has signed notes to a large amount."

"The more fool he!"

"He is in extreme distress; and it is not only himself. It is his poor wife."

"Ah, he has a poor wife?"

"I didn't know it; but he confessed everything. He married two years since, secretly."

"Why secretly?"

Caroline Spencer glanced about her, as if she feared listeners. Then softly, in a little impressive tone,—

"She was a countess!"

"Are you very sure of that?"

"She has written me a most beautiful letter."

"Asking you for money, eh?"

"Asking me for confidence and sympathy," said Miss Spencer. "She has been disinherited by her father. My cousin told me the story, and she tells it in her own way, in the letter. It is like an old romance. Her father opposed the marriage, and when he discovered that she had secretly disobeyed him he cruelly cast her off. It is really most romantic. They are the oldest family in Provence."

I looked and listened in wonder. It really seemed that the poor woman was enjoying the "romance" of having a discarded countess-cousin, out of Provence, so deeply as almost to lose the sense of what the forfeiture of her money meant for her.

"My dear young lady," I said, "you don't want to be ruined for picturesqueness' sake?"

"I shall not be ruined. I shall come back before long to stay with them. The Countess insists upon that."

"Come back! You are going home, then?"

She sat for a moment with her eyes lowered, then with an heroic suppression of a faint tremor of the voice, — "I have no money for travelling!" she answered.

"You gave it *all* up?"

"I have kept enough to take me home."

I gave an angry groan; and at this juncture Miss Spencer's cousin, the fortunate possessor of her sacred savings and of the hand of the Provençal countess, emerged from the little dining-room. He stood on the threshold for an instant, removing the stone

from a plump apricot which he had brought away from the table; then he put the apricot into his mouth, and while he let it sojourn there, gratefully, stood looking at us, with his long legs apart and his hands dropped into the pockets of his velvet jacket. My companion got up, giving him a thin glance which I caught in its passage, and which expressed a strange commixture of resignation and fascination,—a sort of perverted exaltation. Ugly, vulgar, pretentious, dishonest, as I thought the creature, he had appealed successfully to her eager and tender imagination. I was deeply disgusted, but I had no warrant to interfere, and at any rate I felt that it would be vain.

The young man waved his hand with a pictorial gesture. "Nice old court," he observed. "Nice mellow old place. Good tone in that brick. Nice crooked old staircase."

Decidedly, I could n't stand it; without responding I gave my hand to Caroline Spencer. She looked at me an instant with her little white face and expanded eyes, and as she showed her pretty teeth I suppose she meant to smile.

"Don't be sorry for me," she said, "I am very sure I shall see something of this dear old Europe yet."

I told her that I would not bid her good-by; I should find a moment to come back the next morning. Her cousin, who had put on his sombrero again, flourished it off at me by way of a bow, upon which I took my departure.

The next morning I came back to the inn, where I met in the court the landlady, more loosely laced than in the evening. On my asking for Miss Spencer, — "*Partie*, monsieur," said the hostess. "She went away last night at ten o'clock, with her — her — not her husband, eh? — in fine, her *monsieur*. They went down to the American ship." I turned away; the poor girl had been about thirteen hours in Europe.

## IV.

I MYSELF, more fortunate, was there some five years longer. During this period I lost my friend Latouche, who died of a malarious fever during a tour in the Levant. One of the first things I did on my return was to go up to Grimwinter to pay a consolatory visit to his poor mother. I found her in deep affliction, and I sat with her the whole of the morning that followed my arrival (I had come in late at night), listening to her tearful descant and singing the praises of my friend. We talked of nothing else, and our conversation terminated only with the arrival of a quick little woman who drove herself up to the door in a "carry-all," and whom I saw toss the reins upon the horse's back with the briskness of a startled sleeper throwing back the bed-clothes. She jumped out of the carry-all and she jumped into the room. She proved to be the minister's wife and the great town-gossip, and she had evidently, in the latter capacity, a choice morsel to communicate. I was

as sure of this as I was that poor Mrs. Latouche was not absolutely too bereaved to listen to her. It seemed to me discreet to retire; I said I believed I would go and take a walk before dinner.

"And, by the way," I added, "if you will tell me where my old friend Miss Spencer lives, I will walk to her house."

The minister's wife immediately responded. Miss Spencer lived in the fourth house beyond the Baptist church; the Baptist church was the one on the right, with that queer green thing over the door; they called it a portico, but it looked more like an old-fashioned bedstead.

"Yes, do go and see poor Caroline," said Mrs. Latouche. "It will refresh her to see a strange face."

"I should think she had had enough of strange faces!" cried the minister's wife.

"I mean, to see a visitor," said Mrs. Latouche, amending her phrase.

"I should think she had had enough of visitors!" her companion rejoined. "But *you* don't mean to stay ten years," she added, glancing at me.

"Has she a visitor of that sort?" I inquired, perplexed.

"You will see the sort!" said the minister's wife. "She's easily seen; she generally sits in the front yard. Only take care what you say to her, and be very sure you are polite."

"Ah, she is so sensitive?"

The minister's wife jumped up and dropped me a curtsey, a most ironical curtsey.

"That 's what she is, if you please. She 's a countess!"

And pronouncing this word with the most scathing accent, the little woman seemed fairly to laugh in the Countess's face. I stood a moment, staring, wondering, remembering.

"Oh, I shall be very polite!" I cried; and grasping my hat and stick, I went on my way.

I found Miss Spencer's residence without difficulty. The Baptist church was easily identified, and the small dwelling near it, of a rusty white, with a large central chimney-stack and a Virginia creeper, seemed naturally and properly the abode of a frugal old maid with a taste for the picturesque. As I approached I slackened my pace, for I had heard that some one was always sitting in the front yard, and I wished to reconnoitre. I looked cautiously over the low white fence which separated the small garden-space from the unpaved street; but I descried nothing in the shape of a countess. A small straight path led up to the crooked door-step, and on either side of it was a little grass-plot, fringed with currant-bushes. In the middle of the grass, on either side, was a large quince-tree, full of antiquity and contortions, and beneath one of the quince-trees were placed a small table and a couple of chairs. On the table lay a piece of unfinished embroidery and two or three books in bright-colored paper covers. I went

in at the gate and paused half-way along the path, scanning the place for some farther token of its occupant, before whom — I could hardly have said why — I hesitated abruptly to present myself. Then I saw that the poor little house was very shabby. I felt a sudden doubt of my right to intrude; for curiosity had been my motive, and curiosity here seemed singularly indelicate. While I hesitated, a figure appeared in the open doorway and stood there looking at me. I immediately recognized Caroline Spencer, but she looked at me as if she had never seen me before. Gently, but gravely and timidly, I advanced to the door-step, and then I said, with an attempt at friendly badinage, —

"I waited for you over there to come back, but you never came."

"Waited where, sir?" she asked softly, and her light-colored eyes expanded more than before.

She was much older; she looked tired and wasted.

"Well," I said, "I waited at Havre."

She stared; then she recognized me. She smiled and blushed and clasped her two hands together. "I remember you now," she said. "I remember that day." But she stood there, neither coming out nor asking me to come in. She was embarrassed.

I, too, felt a little awkward. I poked my stick into the path. "I kept looking out for you, year after year," I said.

"You mean in Europe?" murmured Miss Spencer.

"In Europe, of course! Here, apparently, you are easy enough to find."

She leaned her hand against the unpainted door-post, and her head fell a little to one side. She looked at me for a moment without speaking, and I thought I recognized the expression that one sees in women's eyes when tears are rising. Suddenly she stepped out upon the cracked slab of stone before the threshold and closed the door behind her. Then she began to smile intently, and I saw that her teeth were as pretty as ever. But there had been tears too.

"Have you been there ever since?" she asked, almost in a whisper.

"Until three weeks ago. And you — you never came back?"

Still looking at me with her fixed smile, she put her hand behind her and opened the door again. "I am not very polite," she said. "Won't you come in?"

"I am afraid I incommode you."

"Oh, no!" she answered, smiling more than ever. And she pushed back the door, with a sign that I should enter.

I went in, following her. She led the way to a small room on the left of the narrow hall, which I supposed to be her parlor, though it was at the back of the house, and we passed the closed door of another apartment which apparently enjoyed a view of the quince-trees. This one looked out upon a

small wood-shed and two clucking hens. But I thought it very pretty, until I saw that its elegance was of the most frugal kind; after which, presently, I thought it prettier still, for I had never seen faded chintz and old mezzotint engravings, framed in varnished autumn leaves, disposed in so graceful a fashion. Miss Spencer sat down on a very small portion of the sofa, with her hands tightly clasped in her lap. She looked ten years older, and it would have sounded very perverse now to speak of her as pretty. But I thought her so; or at least I thought her touching. She was peculiarly agitated. I tried to appear not to notice it; but suddenly, in the most inconsequent fashion, — it was an irresistible memory of our little friendship at Havre, — I said to her, "I do incommode you. You are distressed."

She raised her two hands to her face, and for a moment kept it buried in them. Then, taking them away, — "It's because you remind me — " she said.

"I remind you, you mean, of that miserable day at Havre?"

She shook her head. "It was not miserable. It was delightful."

"I never was so shocked as when, on going back to your inn the next morning, I found you had set sail again."

She was silent a moment; and then she said, "Please let us not speak of that."

"Did you come straight back here?" I asked.

"I was back here just thirty days after I had gone away."

"And here you have remained ever since?"

"Oh, yes!" she said gently.

"When are you going to Europe again?"

This question seemed brutal; but there was something that irritated me in the softness of her resignation, and I wished to extort from her some expression of impatience.

She fixed her eyes for a moment upon a small sunspot on the carpet; then she got up and lowered the window-blind a little, to obliterate it. Presently, in the same mild voice, answering my question, she said, "Never!"

"I hope your cousin repaid you your money."

"I don't care for it now," she said, looking away from me.

"You don't care for your money?"

"For going to Europe."

"Do you mean that you would not go if you could?"

"I can't — I can't," said Caroline Spencer. "It is all over; I never think of it."

"He never repaid you, then!" I exclaimed.

"Please — please," she began.

But she stopped; she was looking toward the door. There had been a rustling and a sound of steps in the hall.

I also looked toward the door, which was open, and now admitted another person, a lady, who paused

just within the threshold. Behind her came a young man. The lady looked at me with a good deal of fixedness, long enough for my glance to receive a vivid impression of herself. Then she turned to Caroline Spencer, and, with a smile and a strong foreign accent, —

"Excuse my interruption!" she said. "I knew not you had company, the gentleman came in so quietly."

With this she directed her eyes toward me again.

She was very strange; yet my first feeling was that I had seen her before. Then I perceived that I had only seen ladies who were very much like her. But I had seen them very far away from Grimwinter, and it was an odd sensation to be seeing her here. Whither was it the sight of her seemed to transport me? To some dusky landing before a shabby Parisian *quatrième*, — to an open door revealing a greasy ante-chamber, and to Madame leaning over the banisters, while she holds a faded dressing-gown together and bawls down to the portress to bring up her coffee. Miss Spencer's visitor was a very large woman, of middle age, with a plump, dead-white face, and hair drawn back *a la chinoise*. She had a small penetrating eye, and what is called in French an agreeable smile. She wore an old pink cashmere dressing-gown, covered with white embroideries, and, like the figure in my momentary vision, she was holding it together in front with a bare and rounded arm and a plump and deeply dimpled hand.

"It is only to spick about my *café*," she said to Miss Spencer, with her agreeable smile. "I should like it served in the garden under the leetle tree."

The young man behind her had now stepped into the room, and he also stood looking at me. He was a pretty-faced little fellow, with an air of provincial foppishness,—a tiny Adonis of Grimwinter. He had a small pointed nose, a small pointed chin, and, as I observed, the most diminutive feet. He looked at me foolishly, with his mouth open.

"You shall have your coffee," said Miss Spencer, who had a faint red spot in each of her cheeks.

"It is well!" said the lady in the dressing-gown. "Find your bouk," she added, turning to the young man.

He gazed vaguely round the room. "My grammar, d'ye mean?" he asked, with a helpless intonation.

But the large lady was inspecting me, curiously, and gathering in her dressing-gown with her white arm.

"Find your bouk, my friend," she repeated.

"My poetry, d'ye mean?" said the young man, also staring at me again.

"Never mind your bouk," said his companion. "To-day we will talk. We will make some conversation. But we must not interrupt. Come;" and she turned away. "Under the leetle tree," she added, for the benefit of Miss Spencer.

Then she gave me a sort of salutation, and a

"Monsieur!" with which she swept away again, followed by the young man.

Caroline Spencer stood there with her eyes fixed upon the ground.

"Who is that?" I asked.

"The Countess, my cousin."

"And who is the young man?"

"Her pupil, Mr. Mixter."

This description of the relation between the two persons who had just left the room made me break into a little laugh. Miss Spencer looked at me gravely.

"She gives French lessons; she has lost her fortune."

"I see," I said. "She is determined to be a burden to no one. That is very proper."

Miss Spencer looked down on the ground again. "I must go and get the coffee," she said.

"Has the lady many pupils?" I asked.

"She has only Mr. Mixter. She gives all her time to him."

At this I could not laugh, though I smelt provocation; Miss Spencer was too grave. "He pays very well," she presently added, with simplicity. "He is very rich. He is very kind. He takes the Countess to drive." And she was turning away.

"You are going for the Countess's coffee?" I said.

"If you will excuse me a few moments."

"Is there no one else to do it?"

She looked at me with the softest serenity. "I keep no servants."

"Can she not wait upon herself?"

"She is not used to that."

"I see," said I, as gently as possible. "But before you go, tell me this: who is this lady?"

"I told you about her before — that day. She is the wife of my cousin, whom you saw."

"The lady who was disowned by her family in consequence of her marriage?"

"Yes; they have never seen her again. They have cast her off."

"And where is her husband?"

"He is dead."

"And where is your money?"

The poor girl flinched; there was something too consistent in my questions. "I don't know," she said wearily.

But I continued a moment. "On her husband's death this lady came over here?"

"Yes, she arrived one day."

"How long ago?"

"Two years."

"She has been here ever since?"

"Every moment."

"How does she like it?"

"Not at all."

"And how do *you* like it?"

Miss Spencer laid her face in her two hands an instant, as she had done ten minutes before.

Then, quickly, she went to get the Countess's coffee.

I remained alone in the little parlor; I wanted to see more, to learn more. At the end of five minutes the young man whom Miss Spencer had described as the Countess's pupil came in. He stood looking at me for a moment with parted lips. I saw he was a very rudimentary young man.

"She wants to know if you won't come out there," he observed at last.

"Who wants to know?"

"The Countess. That French lady."

"She has asked you to bring me?"

"Yes, sir," said the young man feebly, looking at my six feet of stature.

I went out with him, and we found the Countess sitting under one of the little quince-trees in front of the house. She was drawing a needle through the piece of embroidery which she had taken from the small table. She pointed graciously to the chair beside her, and I seated myself. Mr. Mixter glanced about him, and then sat down in the grass at her feet. He gazed upward, looking with parted lips from the Countess to me.

"I am sure you speak French," said the Countess, fixing her brilliant little eyes upon me.

"I do, madam, after a fashion," I answered in the lady's own tongue.

"*Voilà!*" she cried most expressively. "I knew it so soon as I looked at you. You have been in my poor dear country."

"A long time."

"You know Paris?"

"Thoroughly, madam." And with a certain conscious purpose I let my eyes meet her own.

She presently, hereupon, moved her own and glanced down at Mr. Mixter "What are we talking about?" she demanded of her attentive pupil.

He pulled his knees up, plucked at the grass with his hand, stared, blushed a little. "You are talking French," said Mr. Mixter.

"*La belle découverte!*" said the Countess. "Here are ten months," she explained to me, "that I am giving him lessons. Don't put yourself out not to say he's an idiot; he won't understand you."

"I hope your other pupils are more gratifying," I remarked.

"I have no others. They don't know what French is in this place; they don't want to know. You may therefore imagine the pleasure it is to me to meet a person who speaks it like yourself." I replied that my own pleasure was not less; and she went on drawing her stitches through her embroidery, with her little finger curled out. Every few moments she put her eyes close to her work, near-sightedly. I thought her a very disagreeable person; she was coarse, affected, dishonest, and no more a countess than I was a caliph. "Talk to me of Paris," she went on. "The very name of it gives me an emotion! How long since you were there?"

"Two months ago."

"Happy man! Tell me something about it. What were they doing? Oh, for an hour of the boulevard!"

"They were doing about what they are always doing, — amusing themselves a good deal."

"At the theatres, eh?" sighed the Countess. "At the *cafés-concerts*, at the little tables in front of the doors? *Quelle existence!* You know I am a Parisienne, monsieur," she added, "to my finger-tips."

"Miss Spencer was mistaken, then," I ventured to rejoin, "in telling me that you are a Provençale."

She stared a moment, then she put her nose to her embroidery, which had a dingy, desultory aspect. "Ah, I am a Provençale by birth; but I am a Parisienne by — inclination."

"And by experience, I suppose?" I said.

She questioned me a moment with her hard little eyes. "Oh, experience! I could talk of experience if I wished. I never expected, for example, that experience had *this* in store for me." And she pointed with her bare elbow, and with a jerk of her head, at everything that surrounded her, — at the little white house, the quince-tree, the rickety paling, even at Mr. Mixter.

"You are in exile!" I said, smiling.

"You may imagine what it is! These two years that I have been here I have passed hours — hours! One gets used to things, and sometimes I think I have got used to this. But there are some things that are always beginning over again. For example, my coffee."

"Do you always have coffee at this hour?" I inquired.

She tossed back her head and measured me.

"At what hour would you prefer me to have it? I must have my little cup after breakfast."

"Ah, you breakfast at this hour?"

"At mid-day — *comme cela se fait.* Here they breakfast at a quarter past seven! That 'quarter past' is charming!"

"But you were telling me about your coffee," I observed sympathetically.

"My *cousine* can't believe in it; she can't understand it. She's an excellent girl; but that little cup of black coffee, with a drop of cognac, served at this hour, — they exceed her comprehension. So I have to break the ice every day, and it takes the coffee the time you see to arrive. And when it arrives, monsieur! If I don't offer you any of it you must not take it ill. It will be because I know you have drunk it on the boulevard."

I resented extremely this scornful treatment of poor Caroline Spencer's humble hospitality; but I said nothing, in order to say nothing uncivil. I only looked on Mr. Mixter, who had clasped his arms round his knees and was watching my companion's demonstrative graces in solemn fascination. She presently saw that I was observing him; she glanced at me with a little bold explanatory smile. "You know, he adores me," she murmured, putting her nose into her tapestry again. I expressed the

promptest credence, and she went on. "He dreams of becoming my lover! Yes, it's his dream. He has read a French novel; it took him six months. But ever since that he has thought himself the hero, and me the heroine!"

Mr. Mixter had evidently not an idea that he was being talked about; he was too preoccupied with the ecstasy of contemplation. At this moment Caroline Spencer came out of the house, bearing a coffee-pot on a little tray. I noticed that on her way from the door to the table she gave me a single quick, vaguely appealing glance. I wondered what it signified; I felt that it signified a sort of half-frightened longing to know what, as a man of the world who had been in France, I thought of the Countess. It made me extremely uncomfortable. I could not tell her that the Countess was very possibly the runaway wife of a little hair-dresser. I tried suddenly, on the contrary, to show a high consideration for her. But I got up; I could n't stay longer. It vexed me to see Caroline Spencer standing there like a waiting-maid.

"You expect to remain some time at Grimwinter?" I said to the Countess.

She gave a terrible shrug.

"Who knows? Perhaps for years. When one is in misery! — *Chere belle*," she added, turning to Miss Spencer, "you have forgotten the cognac!"

I detained Caroline Spencer as, after looking a moment in silence at the little table, she was turning

away to procure this missing delicacy. I silently gave her my hand in farewell. She looked very tired, but there was a strange hint of prospective patience in her severely mild little face. I thought she was rather glad I was going. Mr. Mixter had risen to his feet and was pouring out the Countess's coffee. As I went back past the Baptist church I reflected that poor Miss Spencer had been right in her presentiment that she should still see something of that dear old Europe.

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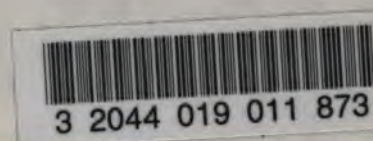


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